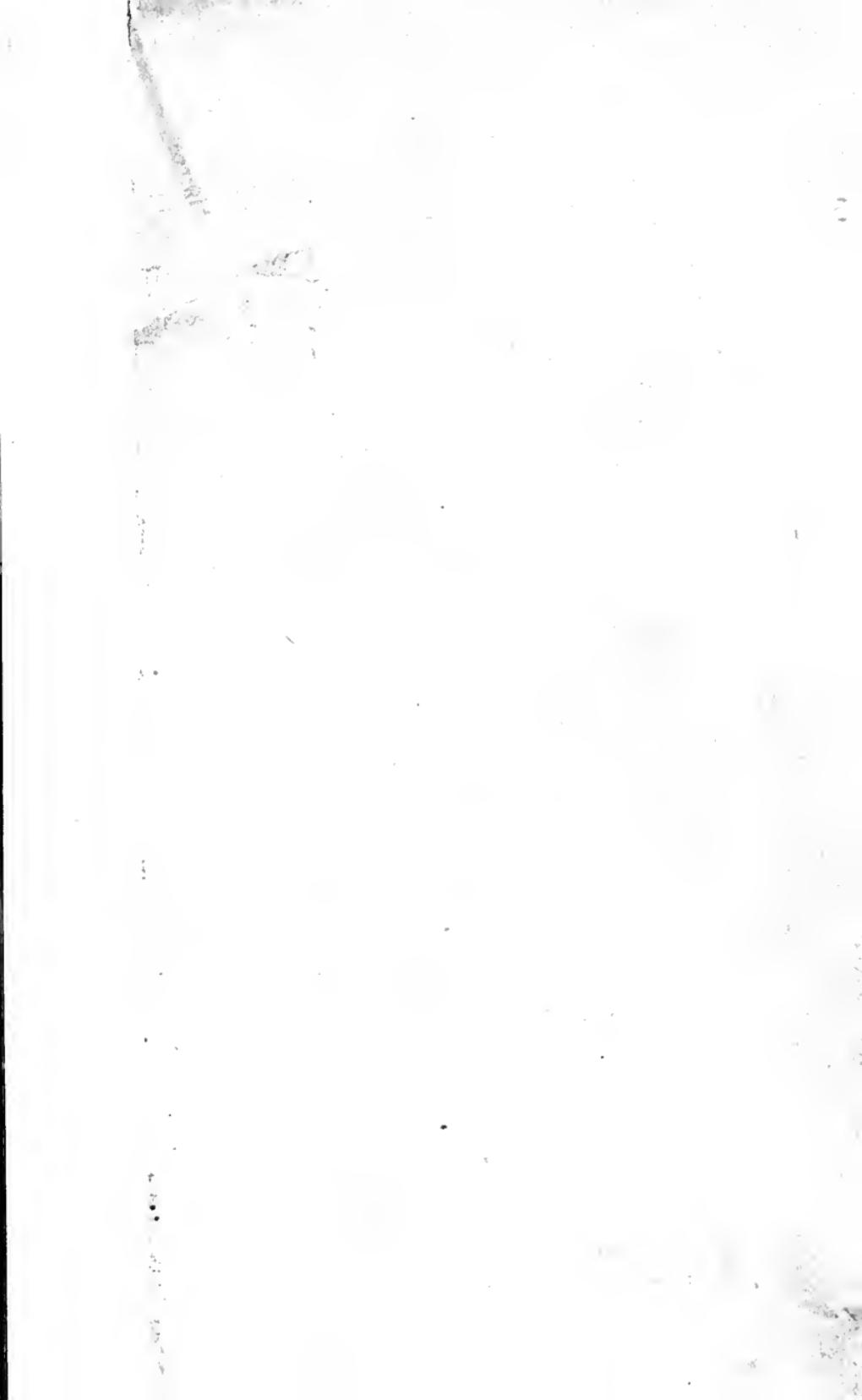






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# GIULIO MALATESTA

A Novel.

BY

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"LA BEATA," "MARIETTA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# GIULIO MALATESTA.

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BOOK I.

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AT BOLOGNA IN 1828.

VOL. I.



# GIULIO MALATESTA.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STUDENTS AT BOLOGNA.

THOSE whose ideas of a university town have been formed from an acquaintance, either of many years, or of a single day, with our English Almae Matres on the banks of Isis or of Cam, are apt to be disappointed with their first visit to any of the celebrated seats of academical learning on the Continent. No stranger, no foreigner, no country bumpkin could enter Oxford or Cambridge without at once being struck by the fact, that either of them was a town, such as no other that he had ever seen in the world before. The University is what he immediately sees. The towns exist but as appendages to those magnificent establishments.

All that meets the stranger's eye at either of our bower'd—though not olived—Academes proclaims the speciality of the place. There—but it is needless to tell the English reader what Oxford and Cambridge are. Suffice it to tell him, that he will see nothing of all that makes our seats of academical learning so striking to the outward eye, at Padua, Pavia, Bologna, Pisa, or Siena. We all know that the idea and essence of a University does not consist in, and may exist without, the outward bodily presentment of magnificent colleges, shaven lawns, and lovely groves. Even gowns of bombazine and silk, and trencher caps, are not essential to it. If it were absolutely requisite to define the corporeal and local habitat of the academic idea, the same philosophers, who have assigned the pineal gland to the soul as her dwelling, might probably find it in the Vice-Chancellor's mace,—poker, we used irreverently to call it in the naughty, though very pleasant, old times. But I suppose the present improved generation of ingenuous British youth is more pretty-spoken.

Well, this pineal gland of the academic system no doubt exists in the continental universities. The university poker may, no doubt, be discovered

by social anatomists at any of the above-named ancient seats of learning. But even that venerable symbol is not made visible to the eyes of admiring mankind, after the fashion of our English universities. The Paduan or Pisan pokers never parade the streets of their respective cities with conscious pride, while all burgherdom and bumpkindom shade their eyes as the embodied and concentrated majesty of the gown passes. The investigator would need to search perseveringly before he could obtain ocular evidence of the existence of that seat of the academic soul.

The stranger in either of the cities which have been named, on inquiring for the University, would very possibly be told by several of the inhabitants that they really did not know where it was situated; much as a Londoner might not know where the church of St. Andrew Undershaft is. He would, however, easily find some one who would point out to him, in no specially prominent part of the town, a building little, if at all, distinguished from many of the other "palace" residences of the city. If he entered it, he might observe in the empty court, or arcaded corridors of the building, the sculptured coats of arms of former generations

of doctors and “magnificent rectors.”\* But there would be nothing else to mark the special character of the place. If he persevered so far in his researches as to penetrate into the interior of the building, he would find a series of dreary and shabby-looking rooms, furnished with a pulpit or reading-desk, and a surrounding hemicycle of bare forms, such as may be seen in many a village school-room. He would then be informed that he had seen the University. And though persistent inquiry might, probably, as has been said, succeed in causing some such more or less ornamental metallic symbol of the academic existence as has been spoken of to be brought forth from its abiding cupboard for the satisfaction of the stranger, it would be the truth, that the inspection of those dismal rooms and their mean fittings had shown him all, and more than all, of the University that the townsfolk of the city in which it is situated ever see.

Then, the absence of any distinctive costume worn by the young men attending the classes, the

\* “Rector magnificus” is the title of the functionary highest in rank, and corresponding with our Chancellor, of the universities in the north of Italy.

slenderness of their connexion with the academic body, consisting solely in attendance on certain lectures, the independence of their mode of life, which is subject to no rules or regulations whatever differing from those observed by all the other inhabitants of the city—all these circumstances contribute to despoil the continental universities of all those goodly outward and visible signs of their existence which are so striking and attractive in our own country.

At Bologna, indeed, something has of late years been done towards embellishing the University building. The arcades that run along the interior of the wall which shuts out the main court-yard of the building from the street have been somewhat gaudily painted with a vast number of the heraldic devices of former ornaments to the University; and the library, which has recently been decorated rather too brilliantly in a similar style, is a fine room. But thousands of strangers might, and do, pass through Bologna without having their attention called to these magnificences; and it is still more probable that no special physiognomy in the population crowding the streets would remind them that they were in one of the most celebrated and

the most ancient university towns in Europe. The letters of cheap bachelor apartments no doubt are aware that there is a greater demand for such accommodation in Bologna than in other cities ; and those who know the town and all the corners of it well, may know where, in certain eating-houses and certain cafés, the student class of the population may be found, manifesting, in an unobtrusive manner, its special idiosyncrasies.

It was not, however, in any one of the haunts of that kind, specially frequented by the students, that our present story has to open itself, although the circumstances to be placed before the reader will be most conveniently explained by a report of a conversation which took place between two individuals, who were completing the last twelvemonth of their academical course in the year 1828.

The conversation in question did not occur in any of the frequented places of resort alluded to, because the matter to be discussed was of a nature which, despite the Italian habit of talking of private affairs across a little marble table at a café, in the perfect persuasion that the crowd around are all equally absorbed in their own concerns, and equally inattentive to those of their neighbours,

seemed to one of the interlocutors to render a greater degree of privacy desirable. The spot they had selected unquestionably afforded the assurance of that advantage; besides the further one of commanding one of the most remarkable views in Italy.

Bologna stands on the extreme edge of the immense plain of Lombardy, close to the foot of the most advanced spur of the Apennines. The hills do not unite themselves by gentle and gradual slopes with the flat plain, as is the case in most other similar localities, but throw out a series of buttresses, forming a variety of isolated eminences and vantage points, the sides of which rise abruptly with great steepness, so as to form a boundary line between the hill country and the plain, as marked and decided as any frontier of man's devising. So that, on passing out of the city gates in one direction, the wayfarer enters immediately on the hill country of the Apennines; and, in the opposite direction, on the flat, dusty roads, with their interminable avenues of dust-coloured poplars, and the rich alluvial fields of the great plain of Lombardy.

One of the vantage points thus standing out from the chain of mountains immediately above

Bologna, has been crowned with a notable specimen of those often-recurring churches, which indicate the curious persistence of the superstition in favour of "high places" for the purpose of worship. It is called "*La Madonna di San Luca*;" and though a handsome building in the Greek Cross and cupola style, is far more remarkable on account of its position, than from any other merit. A continuous arcaded colonnade extends the whole distance from the city gate to the platform, on which the church is built, climbing the steep ascent in some parts by a sloping incline, and at other, where the hill-side is more abrupt, by flights of stairs. This immense colonnade, built by the contributions of the city and the surrounding communes, must be some two miles or more in length, and enables the devotees of "*La Madonna di San Luca*" to perform the vows or penances, which enjoin the repetition of a prescribed number of psalms or *aves* at her shrine, without suffering the additional infliction of exposure to sun or rain. And the stranger at Bologna, whose attention has been attracted by the striking position of the church, and by the evident promise of a magnificent panoramic view of the plain of Lombardy, is equally thankful for the singular

manifestation of devotion, which enables him to make the ascent under shelter.

Tempting as such a means of reaching such a spot may seem to the dwellers in northern cities, the colonnade is rarely frequented by any others than persons belonging to one or other of the above-named categories. The Italians do not take constitutional walks. So that on a bright sunny afternoon of a day in March, the two young men, who had sauntered up to "*La Madonna di San Luca*" merely for the sake of a quiet and uninterrupted conversation, had the terrace, and low parapet wall on which they were lounging, entirely to themselves. For though it was one of the first days in Lent, and the number of devotees at the shrine had been proportionably large in the morning, those duties are generally performed in the hours before the "*Angelus*;" for devotion, like other duties, must not be allowed to interfere with the mid-day meal. And as to the other class of climbers to the shrine of "*Nostra Donna di San Luca*," the nomad knights of the red book were still in the capital cities, and had not yet commenced their summer circuits. The place would hardly be found so given up to solitude at any day or hour now, as

it was on that March afternoon in 1828, for the new needs of Italy have required that this prominent and remarkable hill-side, standing out like an advanced work into the plain, should be turned into a strong defensible military position ; and the successive terraces of the mountain have been converted into a series of batteries. There is a small barrack about half way up the ascent ; and soldiers may be seen at all hours—not only sentries at a variety of salient points all up the hill-side, but loungers on the stone-coped parapet walls of the terraces around the church, and under the interminable vistas of the arcades.

The spot which the two students had selected for their colloquy was ill chosen for the purpose of one of them, the principal speaker of the two ; for it cost him infinite trouble to compel the attention of his companion, which was evidently ever and anon wandering away from the earnest discourse of the speaker, to busy itself with the endless details of the immense panorama spread beneath them. They were a singularly contrasted pair, those two students of Bologna ;—the fact that they were such being about the sole point of similarity about their persons or their social position.

The younger-looking of the two was the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, the only son of the Marchese Salvadore Malatesta of Fermo, a very wealthy nobleman, of ancient lineage, well known at Rome, and in the province, of which he was probably the largest landowner, as one of the few laymen on whose loyalty and devotion to the government the Holy See could rely. Though not yet twenty years old, the young Marchese had none of the boyishness, either of appearance or manner, which strongly characterised his older-looking companion. He was a tall, well-grown youth, with abundance of dark glossy curls, a well-cared-for moustache to match, large liquid dark eyes, and a well-formed mouth; unquestionably a very handsome young man. His costume was elegant; and his manners graceful and easy; more so than might have seemed desirable to a good judge of men some fifteen or twenty years older than himself. But then the observer must have been that much his senior to have taken note of the objection. By his contemporaries of either sex, Cesare Malatesta was considered to be, and deserved to be, the cynosure of all neighbouring eyes.

The brilliant young Marchese was very evidently

the leading spirit of the strangely associated couple. But a similar remark would have been almost equally true, had poor Pietro Varani been in company with any other of his fellow-students. Poor Pietro Varani—for that was the name of Cesare's companion—epithet and all, that may almost be said to have been his name, so constantly was the not unkindly yet depreciatory adjective prefixed to it—poor Pietro Varani had quite as decidedly too little as Cesare had too much of self-assertion and self-confidence. And anybody would have said that Pietro was quite right in his estimate of himself ; that in truth there was nothing in him or about him to inspire any feeling of confidence or trust in himself in any way. But that queer self was one of the few things of which Pietro knew absolutely nothing. He was wrong in his estimate of himself ; and so were the contemporaries, who were quite ready to accept his own judgment on that, if on no other subject.

Poor Pietro Varani was the son of the widow of an officer in the French service, who had returned with her invalided husband to her native city some ten years before the date of the conversation to be recorded. He had died about a year ago, leaving

her in very straitened circumstances, which were rendered yet more difficult by the birth of a posthumous daughter a few months after his death. The child was named Francesca; and though her presence in the widow's home to a certain degree increased the difficulty of making both ends meet, as the phrase is, the sunshine which she seemed to bring with her into that dreary and silent dwelling was soon found by the widow, and in a yet greater degree by Pietro, to be very abundant compensation for any such added difficulties.

One of the principal advantages which had induced Major Varani and his wife Marta to choose Bologna, her native city, rather than Corsica, the country of his birth, as their future home, when he had been compelled by failing health to retire from active service, was the means it afforded to their son Pietro of pursuing at very trifling cost the studious career, for which alone he seemed to have any liking or aptitude. His ambition had been to qualify himself for, and obtain a doctor's degree, or "the laurel," as the more poetic phrase goes in the Italian universities, in medicine. And he was now on the point of obtaining that object, after having performed prodigies of self-denial and up-

hill labour, pursued with ardour in the teeth of obstacles of all kinds. But, unhappily, the special branch of all the cognate studies, to which the bent of his mind and inclination impelled him, was that least likely to afford him the very small modicum of food and shelter, which was all he asked of the world. He was an enthusiastic naturalist, and, above all, a botanist. Had there existed any herb of the field which could have served as a substitute for *triticum* or *avena* in keeping body and soul together, he would have discovered it, and been content therewith. But failing such, it seemed likely that his science might fail to afford the very little that he asked from it beyond its own charms. For the present, however, poor Pietra shared his mother's crust; and while happy amid his books and plants, was tormented by no thought for the morrow.

But of all the men in the University of Bologna, one would least have dreamed of seeing Pietro Varani in company with the gay and gallant Cesare Malatesta! The contrast between the outward and visible presentment of the two men was curiously violent. Pietro had not been favoured by Nature with those powerful letters of recommen-

dation, a handsome face and pleasing person. He was somewhat taller than Malatesta ; but the length of limb, which contributed to the beauty of Nature's favourite, made only the gawkiness of her stepson. Loosely put together, and ill knit, poor Pietro shambled in his gait, seemed to use his shoulders as much as his legs for the purpose of progression, and communicated by his every movement to all who saw him an unpleasant sense of jerking discord and want of harmony between his limbs, which appeared to act each in perfect independence of its fellow. His great big head, with its great big face composed of a harlequin set of ill-assorted features, was the fitting complement to his ungainly body. There was very little colour in the pale gaunt cheeks, very little colour in the pale hay-coloured hair and scanty beard, and very little colour in the pale blue eye. The whole face seemed *fade* and washed out. The mouth was large and ill cut, the ears large and coarse, and the nose broad and flattened. Yet, with all this, there was a massive squareness about the chin which denoted power of will ; a knotty development of the rugged brow, which promised vigour of intellect ; and some few persons, possessed of a power of sounding the

depths of human character, analogous to that possessed by others of using the divining rod for the discovery of hidden waters deep buried below the arid surface, might have imagined that they could read in those great pale blue eyes, which always seemed as if they were gazing at some far distance, to the exclusion of all cognisance of nearer objects, indications of a vein of poetic sentiment, and dormant capabilities of enthusiasm, hidden far down in the depths of his moral nature, which only some violent disturbance of the superincumbent soil could ever bring to the surface.

This absent tendency of his companion's eye, and apparently of his mind in company with it, to divest itself of all speculation concerning the matters immediately before it, and employ itself in wandering over the far distant landscape, had already more than once provoked the irritation of Malatesta.

"Oh—è! friend Pietro!" he exclaimed, looking at Varani with no very amiable expression of countenance, but forcibly repressing any manifestation of his ill humour; "are you dreaming? Have you any idea of what we came up here to talk of; or have you forgotten all about it?"

"I was only thinking, Signor Cesare, how far

it might be in a straight line to those snowy mountain-tops we can just see, if you look fixedly towards them, away there beyond the Po."

"The devil take the snowy mountain-tops and the Po too! What have they to do with the matter in hand? Do you remember all that I have been telling you about Maddalena? Have you got it into your wool-gathering brains that I mean to act rightly and honourably towards her?"

"And do you not remember, Signor Cesare," said Varani, painfully calling his mind home from its wanderings on the far horizon, and bringing it to bear upon the matter thus forced upon his attention—"do you not remember that I said I was very glad to hear it? I told you——"

"*Basta!* never mind what you told me! There is no need to have your preaching over again. I tell you that I admit you were right, and that I have made up my mind to do what I ought to do."

"*Bravo! bravissimo!* Honestly, most esteemed Signor Cesare, I will confess that you are a better man than I thought you, honestly now," said poor Pietro, with some emotion; while his companion shot a glance at him from under his suddenly con-

tracted eyebrows, expressive of anything but gratitude for the candour thus evinced. “I honour your self-denial, with all my heart,” Varani continued, his mind now thoroughly occupied with the topic in hand; “you will go no more to the house of La Signora Tacca; you will break off an acquaintance which it would have been safer never to have commenced !”

“Why you——but what should you know, my poor Pietro, about such things!” said Malatesta, jumping off the parapet wall, on which he had been sitting, and taking two or three hasty strides, which brought him back to the spot in front of Varani, who sat on the coping-stone gazing at him with his great blue eyes open to their utmost extent. “Much Maddalena would thank you for settling the matter in that way. Do you think she would, you accomplished defender of damsels’ virtue! No! that is not it. There would have been no need to bring you up here to tell you that!”

“I thought we had come up to look at the view over the plains. It is so beautiful under the afternoon sun,” said Pietro, innocently.

“Bah!” growled Cesare, with an intensity of disgust that only an Italian organ and Italian fea-

tures could have expressed in so short a space ; but resuming in the next instant a manner of condescending and patronising good-fellowship, which would have been far more offensive to Varani than his ill temper, if Pietro had at all comprehended it, he continued :

*No ! Pietro mio !* I don't mean that. And I think that you will agree that what I do mean is better than that. Now listen to me with all your might ! I mean to marry Maddalena Tacca ! ”

Pietro here opened his mouth also, as well as his eyes, which had been before stretched to the uttermost power of the lids ; but no words came from him.

“ Can I do better ? Have I not won her heart—and such a heart ! Would it not be baser than all else to break it ? Give up Maddalena ! No ! not if I have to give up all the world beside ! Is she not a wife for a prince ? ”

Varani still seemed unable to give utterance to his sentiments upon the subject, whatever they were. But he slowly nodded his great head some half-dozen times, as he sat on the low wall looking up into the handsome face of Malatesta standing exactly in front of him ; and at last, with an ap-

parently painful convulsion, jerked out, one by one, the words: "La Maddalena is worthy to be the wife of the best man who is worthy of her."

"And as she, I presume, must be the judge on that point, and as I have some little reason to think that she has made up her mind upon the subject, I hope you will agree with me, that my plan is a better one than giving her up. I intend to make Maddalena Tacca the Marchesa Maddalena Malatesta! What has your wisdom to say to that?"

"It seems to me," said Varani, slowly, "that it would be more to the purpose to ask what the Marchese Salvadore at Fermo, your father, will say to it."

"There is no doubt at all what he would say," replied the other, "and therefore there is no need of asking him. Certainly I shall never marry my sweet Maddalena if I wait till he consents to my doing so. But I did not think, Signor Varani, that *you* would be found among the supporters of the old-fashioned prejudices which would see anything objectionable in such a match. I had been led to expect more liberal views from you."

The Marchese Cesare Malatesta knew perfectly

well indeed, not only that his companion had been educated from his cradle upwards in the school of those somewhat ultra-revolutionary ideas which had been fostered and forced upon the inhabitants of Italy, and especially of the Pontifical States, by the intolerable badness of the existing governments, but that his mother and his humble house were especially noted in the black books of the Papal police. Poor Pietro, indeed, had not made himself conspicuous as a violent politician. He had been too much absorbed by his scientific studies, had lived too solitary a life, and, at the same time, one too fully occupied for such to have been the case. But all his feelings and all his theories on social questions were, as Malatesta well knew, of a class that would lead him to approve, rather than object, to a marriage which set at nought the old world and conservative theories on the subject.

“From *me!*” he said, in answer to the last words of his companion; “but what matters my opinion on the matter. You are not of age; you cannot marry without your father’s consent. And even if you were of age, how could you make a marriage which he would never forgive?”

"You must excuse me, Pietro *mio*," returned Cesare, in a tone that was half genuine sneer and half mock-heroic, "if I tell you that your remarks betray an equal ignorance of canon law, and of the strength of an immense and virtuous passion. You may be deep in botany; but of Law or Love you are, forgive me for saying it, profoundly ignorant. My father's consent is in no wise necessary to my good and lawful marriage, as I shall very easily prove to you from this authority;"—and he drew a small parchment-bound volume from his pocket as he spoke. "For the irrevocable nature of my determination to make Maddalena mine, at whatever cost of quarrel with my family and eventual sacrifice of my own interests, I can only refer you to a less easily read volume," he continued, laying his hand very emphatically and gracefully on his heart, as he uttered the concluding words. "Look here," he said, falling into a more business-like tone as he proceeded to turn over the leaves of his volume till he came to the chapter he was in search of; "here are the canons of the Church respecting the holy sacrament of marriage. The rule is simple enough and clear enough. Any two persons of marriageable age, not subject to any of

the canonical impediments to marriage, appearing before their parish priest, or before the bishop of the diocese, together with two witnesses, and in their presence declaring that they mutually take each other for man and wife, are such indissolubly. Nothing else is needed to make them rightly, legally, and irrevocably one."

"But," said Varani, "surely the law punishes clandestine marriages?"

"Yes!" returned Malatesta, who had evidently made himself master of the subject; "that is the beauty of our ecclesiastical government. The civil law punishes what the ecclesiastical law has done. But it don't undo it! And as for the punishment, in the first place the law inflicts it only on those whom it can catch. And in the next place, on the principle, I suppose, that it is no use crying over spilt milk, the punishment is not a very terrible one;—a few months—perhaps only a few weeks—of imprisonment, generally commuted into reclusion in a monastery. No such very great price to pay for such a wife as Maddalena!"

There was silence between the young men for a few minutes, while Varani was conning the text-book, which the other had put into his hands.

"Yes!" said Varani, as he returned the little

volume, “it seems clear enough that a marriage so made is as indissoluble as any other. But I observe that Mother Church protests her ‘detestation’ for such marriages.”

“We have nothing to do with her private likes or dislikes in the matter,” said Cesare, dogmatically. “She does the deed. She makes the marriage, calls it sacred, declares it a holy sacrament, and holds it to be indissolubly binding. Whether she all the time detests it or not, is nothing to anybody but herself.”

“That is true enough!” said Varani, with a smile, which showed that respect or affection for the Church had made no part of his teaching;—as, indeed, it would have been difficult to find a layman at that day, and in that country, especially among the rising generation, who felt differently on the subject;—“if we must needs obey her laws, I don’t think we need trouble ourselves about her tastes.”

“I should think not! And now listen, my dear fellow, and I will tell you my plan. For, somehow or other, Varani, I own I hardly can tell how it is, but I have such a feeling of respect for your character and judgment, that I am anxious to have

your approval in the matter. You know it was your good counsel that made me give up all thoughts of acting towards Maddalena in a way of which I am now heartily ashamed."

"*Che, che!* Your own better nature——" interrupted Varani.

"Well, well! any way, let those bygones be bygones! Now listen to my present scheme. It would not do to go before the parish priest for many reasons. He would know Maddalena; he would suspect what we were up to; he would get wind of there being something between us; and we should get into a mess."

"How get into a mess, if what the book there says holds good?" asked Pietro.

"Why, didn't you point out that the Church detested such marriages? Well, that being the case, she won't assist you to make them, if she can help it."

"But how can she help it?" insisted Varani.

"Simply by bolting!" said Malatesta, making a gesture with his left hand and right arm significative of that manœuvre. "To make the marriage, the priest must hear the declaration of the parties to the contract. He will avoid doing so, if

he can. Why, I knew a case in which a couple had watched the Signor *Parroco* into the shop of a *farmacista*,\* where the old fellow used to go for his evening chat. They came in upon him on a sudden ; but he knew, as soon as he set eyes upon them, what they were up to, and, clapping his hands up to his ears, made a dash at the door. But the *sposo*, being up to the dodge, had slipped the bolt of the shop door as he came in. So the priest was fairly caught, and the job was done."

"And will that be your way of doing it?" demanded Verani, with an explosion of most unmelodious laughter.

"Not exactly!" replied Malatesta. "I have told you I mean to have nothing to say to the *Reverendo Signor Parroco*. I mean to be married in style by his Eminènce the Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna. The sacred canons, you will observe, call the Bishop *parochus parochorum*, and as such consider him competent, *à fortiori* as one may say, to do aught which they are able to do. And his Eminence will be the man for our little affair,

\* Apothecary. The apothecary's shop is a very common place of meeting for elderly gossips, especially in the smaller country towns of Italy. The "case" in the text is fact.

both because having no knowledge of either me or Maddalena, he will suspect nothing, and because he is too old to run away."

"But you won't catch his Eminence in an apothecary's shop! How will you get at him?" urged Varani.

"Listen! and you will see that I have looked not only before leaping, but before deciding on making the spring," said Malatesta, with a capable air. "This is how it is to be. You know the gardens of the Contini Villa? No!" he continued, as Varani made a negative gesture; "I thought everybody in Bologna knew the Villa Contini. Well! it lies under the hill there to our left, about three miles from the gate. There are charming gardens behind the house, and one special secluded avenue between clipped hedges twenty feet high or more. At the farthest end from the house this quiet walk ends in a sort of circular arbour, formed of ilex-trees, which must have been planted some time before the Flood. The round space thus enclosed is a good bit larger than the width of the walk, so that a person coming up the walk gets no view of the whole of it. The place is all as quiet and shut in as if it

was really a church. Well! that's where the Archbishop goes for his walk. And he is sure to be there on a Saturday afternoon, if the weather is tolerably fine, as he is to be at mass on the Sunday morning. He drives out, leaves his carriage at the entrance of the gardens, and makes straight for this quiet avenue, to meditate and get an appetite for dinner. Now, I mean to catch the old boy in the arbour at the far end of his walk. He will come sauntering up the avenue thinking of nothing but heaven, and the *beccacce* waiting for him at home. I shall be with Maddalena and my witnesses waiting out of sight, and when he steps out from the avenue under the ilex-trees, the job will be done comfortably and quietly, and past all undoing, in two minutes! What do you say to that?"

"It certainly seems feasible enough," said Varani, after a pause. "Has Maddalena consented to it?"

"Consented! Per Bacco! I should think she did consent! Why, I tell you that Maddalena is more——But it is of no use talking to *you* of that part of the matter," said the handsome young Marchese, suddenly interrupting himself. "Yes, Maddalena Tacca has consented to become the

Marchesa Maddalena Malatesta, and the adored wife of your very humble servant. But now, Pietro *mio*, comes the part of the business on which I want to consult you. *You*, in point of fact, are the author of this marriage. Yes! you need not jump, as if you were going to throw yourself over the parapet. Was it not your counsel and good advice—for which I shall always owe you a debt of gratitude, old fellow—that first opened my eyes to all the wickedness of seeking Maddalena's love on any other terms?"

"But my advice was to let her alone altogether!" eagerly interposed Varani.

"True! it was so, speaking in total ignorance of the heart of either of us. Such a course, I think I may say, would have been as cruel to Maddalena as impossible to me. I think I have done better than that. Can you deny that, having won her heart, I am acting more honourably towards her than I should be by deserting her?"

"No!" said Varani, after another pause, "I cannot deny it. I suppose that, under the circumstances, you are doing the best thing that can be done in the matter."

"That is honestly spoken, like yourself, Varani.

Now, since I have your approbation of the course I am about to follow, and since that course has been adopted in consequence of remonstrances of yours, which you will always look on with satisfaction, and I with gratitude, I think you will not refuse—nay, I think you ought not—and I know that is the main point with you—I think you *ought* not to refuse to lend me a helping hand in bringing the matter to bear. May I not count on your friendship, Pietro *mio*?”

“I—I—I think that I—I—I had rather not speak to Maddalena on the subject!” stammered poor Pietro, turning first red, and then blue, and then green, and jerking his arms about in his agitation as if he were bent on dislocating them. “Indeed, indeed I had rather not!”

“Speak to Maddalena, man! Who ever dreamed of asking you?” cried Malatesta, hardly able to conceal his scorn for the ungainly poor fellow whom he was bent on cajoling. “No! I can do that part of the business for myself without anybody’s aid. What I want of you is simply this;—and I do not think, as I said, that under the circumstances it would be right of you to refuse me. I only ask you to be one of the witnesses of the mar-

riage. I know what I am asking. I know that I am asking you to accept some inconvenience and trouble on our behalf. I will not attempt to conceal from you that the witnesses to such a marriage are likely, unless they take themselves out of the way, to get into some trouble, and be subjected to some short imprisonment. One kind friend, the Conte Mancini of Macerata, has promised me to stand by me on this occasion. He will be one witness. But unless you will stand *our* friend, I know not where to look for the other."

" You, who know all the men of rank in Bologna!" interposed Varani, who had now recovered his composure.

" Yes ! I know them all," returned Malatesta, with well simulated bitterness ; " I know them ; and, with the exception of my good Maso Mancini, there is not one among them to whom I would entrust the honour of my Maddalena. But with *you* ! We thought—Maddalena thought that you would not refuse to protect her by your presence on this occasion. She felt that the step she was taking would be more favourably judged in Bologna here, if you, known and respected as you are, gave it your countenance."

“ Say no more, Signor Cesare ! I will be your other witness , though I cannot think that my being so can exercise any such influence as you speak of. But if it is to be done, a witness must be found ; and—and—you may tell Maddalena I will not fail to do what she asks of me.”

“ That is a good fellow and a true friend. And I need not say that I shall be ready with any assistance that may be needed to enable you to get out of the way for a short time. My plan is to go off immediately after ‘the ceremony’ has been performed. I and Maddalena will show Bologna a clean pair of heels. I have no notion of spending the honeymoon, I in one convent, and my bride in another ! ”

“ Thanks, Signor Cesare ! but I shall not leave Bologna. I care little about the imprisonment. There are plenty of better men than I in the prisons of Bologna ; and God knows that it is more a credit than a disgrace in these times to have seen the inside of them ! I would do more than that for—for—for any cause in which it was necessary,” faltered Pietro.

“ Well, then, my dear fellow, we may count on

you. I am *so* grateful—Maddalena will be *so* grateful!"

"Have you fixed your day?"

"No, not yet. Perhaps Saturday in next week. I shall concert all with you as soon as ever we have settled it."

"So be it!" said Varani. "How beautifully the setting sun is gilding the white walls of Modena!" he added, with a sigh, as he reluctantly left the parapet wall on which he had been sitting. "One would hardly believe that they were twenty miles away! But the horizon far beyond, losing itself in the sunset haze, might be any distance off."

"So it might! Come along!" returned the lighter-hearted man, too well contented with all immediately around him to care to send his thoughts a-roaming over hazy horizons in the distance.

And so the two students sauntered down under the arcades into the city.

## CHAPTER II.

IN THE CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO.

PIETRO VARANI had declared, when he had felt himself called on by his fellow-student to express an opinion on the subject, that Maddalena Tacca was worthy to be the wife of the best man who was worthy of her. And, intense as was the scorn with which the splendid Marchese had regarded his pretension to exercise any judgment at all upon that point, it may be observed that he had far better grounds for arriving at a decided opinion on the subject than Malatesta himself had enjoyed. For ever since Marta Varani and her invalided husband had taken up their abode in Bologna, they had been next-door neighbours of the widow Tacca and her daughter. The two families inha-

bited the third floor of a dreary-looking but respectable and substantial old house in the Piazza di San Domenico. The doors of their respective apartments opened opposite to each other on the same landing-place ; their respective copper buckets jostled each other on their clattering way down the guide-iron, which led from the back windows of the third floor to the well in the court-yard ; their grievances against the porter of the house, who ought to have caused the utter darkness of the long stair which led to the common landing-place to be in some degree mitigated by the glimmer of a small lamp, but who traitorously diverted to other uses the supply of oil, and then declared that the lamp was blown out by the wind —which there was no denying *did* always blow up that staircase enough to extinguish all the lamps before the shrine of San Domenico, for that matter —these doleances were common to both the third-floor families. And, under such circumstances, neighbourhood means more, and leads more necessarily to intimacy, than the mere occupancy of two adjacent tenements. So that the Varani and the Tacca families had become close friends.

La Signora Tacca was the widow of a clerk in

the Pontifical lottery-office, from which establishment she received a very small pension, which, added to the trifle that her husband had contrived to leave behind him, sufficed to maintain her and her daughter in that decency and respectability which are so frequently in Italy made compatible with a degree of poverty which would, to our more exigent people, appear next door to destitution. It is extraordinary on how small a sum of money an Italian family, especially if it consist of females only, will contrive to exist in independence; and how infinitesimal a part of the microscopic income will be spent on the necessary means of keeping body and soul together. But it may be doubted whether such lives, maintained on certain though exceedingly small means, without the necessity for any industry or exertion, without anxiety for the morrow, though compressed and immured as in a prison cell by the unelastic limits of their possibilities, are not paler—more forlorn and dreary—more depressing in their influences, than the more active and more anxious lives of those who are compelled each day to struggle for each day's requirements.

It was amid the safe but inexpressibly dreary

monotony of such a life as this that Maddalena Tacca had grown from infancy to girlhood. The widow Tacca was what the world calls a good woman, and a good mother. In her inmost heart she believed herself to be both ; and to the best of her small lights she strove to be both. In any great and decisive matter it is very possible that she would have preferred her child's advantage to her own. Nevertheless, her utter selfishness in the small matters of their small life made Maddalena's lot a very much harder one than it would otherwise have been. It would need the minute details of many a colourless and uneventful day of that pale life to make the more happily-circumstanced reader understand to what an extent this minute, habitual, unconscious selfishness on the part of one of those two women depressed and overshadowed the existence of the other. Those only who have been placed in circumstances which have made the continual, hourly, unresisting submission to all the exactions of such a selfishness seem to them a duty, and become to them a habit, can tell—no, they cannot *tell*, and perhaps are only partially conscious of—the full effect of the discipline to which they have been subjected. Not wholly an

evil discipline, though by no means altogether good. It may be believed, indeed, that such a continual and undue claim on the patient tolerance, self-abnegation, and long-suffering of a young life, in that spring-tide of its existence, of which tolerance, abnegation, and long-suffering are not the normal growth, would have a tendency to produce results wholly mischievous on natures of the sturdier sort. The natural sense of justice, an instinctive necessity for happiness, and an irresistible impulse to claim their share of the sunshine, even as an imprisoned flower grows towards the light, are stronger in such idiosyncrasies than the gentler and more delicate-natured virtues, and may easily overgrow and stifle them. In more bending and softer natures the result will probably be the reverse. In their case, the meek and diffident plea for their share of all the Heaven-spread banquet of joy and gladness around them is easily repressed and discouraged. They are but too readily taught to believe that no place has been reserved for them at that bounteous table by the Giver of the feast. They accept without questioning and without repining the award which appears to have made it their lot, and which rapidly makes it their nature,

to minister to others rather than to be ministered to; to stand in the shade lest they intercept any sunbeam on its way to warm some one of Fortune's favourites; to seek their chastened contentment only in the reflexion of some other's happiness; and even in the supreme need of loving, which often in such natures is developed in all-consuming strength, as a result of the repression of all other growth, to give in far larger measure than they ever hope to receive.

Such was the nature of Maddalena Tacca, and such had been the result of the life-training she had received. Such were her surroundings and position when chance brought her under the notice of Cesare Malatesta. He had gone one day into the church of San Domenico, for the purpose of showing a stranger guest the celebrated sepulchre of the Saint; and while his friend was examining the masterpieces of the great sculptors who have vied with each other in adorning that wonderful work, had amused himself with furtively gazing at the kneeling figure of Maddalena, as she was complying with the behests of her confessor, by reciting certain litanies at a faldstool in front of the great iron gates which shut off the chapel

enclosing the tomb of the Saint, from the body of the church. He might be pardoned for finding the picture thus offered to his contemplation more attractive than the handiwork of either Niccolo Pisano, Donatello, or Michael Angelo ; especially as standing behind the pilaster on which the huge gate of the chapel hangs, he could gaze his fill, without in any way offending the object of his admiration.

Maddalena was then just about nineteen years old, having been between nine and ten when Marta Varani and her husband and their son, then a year or so older than Maria Tacca's little girl, had returned to Bologna and become their neighbours in the sombre old house situated in the secluded and dreary piazza of San Domenico. Few feet trod the grass-grown pavement of the little area, the irregular-shaped space of which includes two sides of the huge church of San Domenico, save those of the black friars of the adjoining convent, and those of the strangers, mostly English, who came to gaze at the marvels of sculpture that have made the last resting-place of St. Dominic one of the high places of art. A few old women, who had discovered that a special devotion to St. Dominic might be very conveniently combined with a special

opportunity of begging of the heretics who came to worship art at his shrine, were almost the only other persons whom Maddalena was likely to meet when she stepped across from the old house in one corner of the square to the door of the church opposite to it. This visit to the grand old church was an almost daily event in Maddalena's life;—almost the only event of any sort in her day.

It would be scarcely correct to say that this assiduous church-going was the result of religious devotion; although among the various ideas and fragments of knowledge which Pietro Varani had imparted to Maddalena during their intimacy of now nearly ten years' standing, his own anti-clerical and unorthodox notions had no place; partly because a sceptical attitude of mind was uncongenial to a nature wholly fashioned to uninquiring submission; partly because the sentiments and associations connected with her religious faith were the sole elements in her life by which any gleam of poetry, any, however refracted and tinted, ray of an ideal capable of in some degree leavening the dreary dull real of her existence, could by any possibility enter it;—and she unconsciously clung to what *was*, therefore, so precious to her, and he half-consciously recognised the sore need of her

case in this respect, and shrank from depriving her of the sole means of satisfying it. So Maddalena remained an unquestioning daughter of Mother Church. Yet her daily visits to the sacred building were not, as has been said, strictly devotional. She would have crept across the *piazza*, with her graceful kerchief over her head for her sole head-dress, less often, probably, if the neighbouring church, instead of being the grand structure —a museum in every branch of art it really is—had presented to her eye the form and features of a dissenting meeting-house. To Maddalena, the step that passed across the threshold of the fine old church from the sights and sounds of the common life without, to the dim religious light, the hushed stillness, and the noble forms of the poetised life within, was the passage of the frontier line that divided all the meanness, the monotony, the vulgarity, the dreary weariness of irksome, petty cares, and of the realities among which she lived, from all of the beautiful, the noble, and the awful, that had ever spoken vaguely and obscurely, yet oh! so delightfully, to the corresponding ideals and latent capabilities of her nature. The hour spent in the grand old church was, even though

conscious worship occupied no part of it, essentially the sacred hour of Maddalena's day. It was her fairyland—only the expression is too trivial—say, rather, her spirit-world. All within those venerable walls, and beneath the span of those mighty arches, was to her apprehension great, noble, poetised. She walked the long silent aisles musing on the monuments of tyrants, patriots, sages, legislators—the worthies of her city's history, not wholly ignorant of their story, and marvelling what blighting change had fallen on the world to make it all so poor, flat, mean, and small, as it seemed to her to see it in her daily life, when compared with that old world of which the sights around her were the record. A yet more glorified and heroic world revealed itself in fitful glimpses to her imagination through the great works of art among which she wandered. She knew them all right well. And the grand majestic figures which calmly returned her gaze from the wondrous canvas, or spoke to her of great thoughts and noble deeds from colossal frescoes, the forms of beauty in various kinds, which seemed a link stretched across the illimitable chasm between her fancy and that of the gifted ones who produced them in those past

ages,—all these things had become the choice garniture of the reserved inner chambers of her mind. Pietro Varani and the church of San Domenico, with its manifold contents and utterances, had, between them, “educated” Maddalena. The more laborious and more prosy part of the task had fallen to the share of poor Pietro. Of course it did. Could he but have shared in that other and pleasanter part of the work——how much might have happened otherwise than it did ! But was he fitted to assist in that department ? Unhappily he resembled so little any of those other mute instructors of hers on canvas and in marble, that it never entered into the head or heart of Maddalena, unconscious as she was of any posing of the question, that he could be so.

It will be understood, then, that though by no means undevout, devotion was not the sole object of Maddalena’s visits to the church of St. Dominic. And as she knelt, when Malatesta first saw her, with her delicately pure face upturned, there was more of vague half-conscious seeking than of religious rapture found in the large limpid eyes, which were busy among the details of the Gothic tracery far away in the dim vaults above her head, or with the grand

and graceful forms of the frescoes on the walls around her.

It was a singularly fair, refined, and eminently sensitive face, raised and somewhat thrown back, so that the rich golden light of the upper half of the tinted window slanted over it; one of those faces which do not come into their full inheritance of beauty till early girlhood is past; large hazel-grey eyes, serious and sincere; broad glossy waves of chesnut hair; softly modelled features, with more of the Donatello than of the old Greek type in their delicate outline. The brows were clearly marked, and somewhat saddened by a slight depression of their slender line as it reached the temples; the lips unmistakably tender and true, but neither pouting nor glowing. The complexion, though pale, was by no means wholly colourless, but gained from every passing emotion that sort of subdued glow which trembles through an alabaster lamp. Over the whole beautiful face and tall, slender figure, over the lithe hands, listlessly twined together and resting on the top of the faldstool, there lay a shadow of ungirlish sadness, which so chastened and etherealised its expression, that, kneeling thus absorbed, as the jewelled light

poured over her figure, she might have been described in those beautiful lines of Keats :

Rose bloom fell on her hands together pressed ;  
And on her silver cross soft amethyst ;  
And on her hair a glory like a saint ;  
She seemed a splendid Angel newly dressed  
Save wings, for heaven.

Those who imagine that there is nothing more subtle and recondite in the laws which regulate so mysteriously the attraction felt by one individual towards another than what may be explained by the rough and ready rule that "like seeks like," may be surprised at the powerful impression produced on Cesare Malatesta by the sight of Maddalena thus kneeling before her faldstool. Assuredly the above rule would not help us in this case. But is it not the fact that mutual attraction may be oftener observed to exist between natures specially dissimilar ? May it not be that Nature is working in such cases by her wonted compensation methods towards wise ulterior purposes and views of her own ?

Or was it simply the effect of novelty ? Was it that Maddalena was strikingly and unmistakably unlike all the specimens of female youth and

beauty which had ever been offered to his already somewhat satiated attention ?

Be the cause what it might, the fact was that Malatesta was impressed by the pale beauty of Maddalena, in a manner that no other had ever impressed him. He had abundant leisure to contemplate the figure before him, while his friend was engaged in studying the wonderful collection of sculpture which the devotion of several generations has gathered to do honour to the great monk, whose word is yet a living power among the forces that shape the world's destinies. The time thus employed would have appeared wearisomely long to him, had he not been so occupied the while. As it was, the minutes seemed very short, which sufficed him to fix indelibly in his mind every detail of the gracious and harmonious picture—the rare beauty of the upturned face ; the perfect form of the long and slender, but not too slender throat ; the exquisite curve of the outline extending from the point of the delicate little transparent ear to the extremity of the shoulder, and of the returning curve, which brought back the line to the round, flexible, and all but too slender waist ; and the remarkable elegance of the long, slender

hands, the position of which on the back of the faldstool had caused the simple sleeve of her dark-coloured dress to be pushed back, so as to expose to view the admirably formed wrist. The feet, which Cesare's practised eye had sought for among the first of the "points" he was so intently noting in his mental catalogue, were hidden as she knelt beneath the folds of her dress. But, as he said to himself, with those hands and wrists, and that contour of figure, one need have no misgiving about the feet.

Did Cesare Malatesta "fall in love" with this pure and gracious vision there and then, as he gazed on it framed in the sombre spaces of the vast and silent church?

The answer, were I to attempt to give it after my own fashion, might lead us far a-field, and through who knows what fields of more or less edifying dissertation. It will be better, perhaps, and certainly shorter, to allow the question to be answered as Cesare himself would have answered it. After all, his reply will doubtless convey to the judicious reader as correct an estimate as my dissertation could of the real state of the matter.

Cesare, then, would have replied that he was desperately, irrevocably, irremediably in love ; that he must obtain the love of that fair girl kneeling there at the faldstool or die ; that life had no other object for him, and other remarks of the same sort, which Adam no doubt addressed to Eve.

It appeared, indeed, that for the moment, at all events, life had no other object for him but the pursuit of the vision which had charmed him. For, utterly refusing to quit the church with his friend, when the latter had concluded his artistic studies, he continued to watch Maddalena, unobserved by her, till she left the edifice, and then prepared to follow her cautiously to whatsoever home in all Bologna she might betake herself. This task, however, was a much more easy one, and more quickly completed, than he had anticipated. For, almost before he had ventured to leave the door of the church in pursuit, he saw her enter a house not a hundred yards from it on the opposite side of the *piazza*. To ascertain from the porter on which floor the lady lived who had just entered the house was a very easy task ; and then, by a few well-directed inquiries, to learn who and what she was,

and how surrounded, was, for such a person as the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, in such a city as Bologna, scarcely a more difficult one.

In a very few days he had learned all these facts; in a very few more had established an intimacy with Pietro, had found his way into the widow Varani's home, and thence, all too easily, into that of the other widow on the opposite side of the landing. Then came the task of gaining Maddalena's affections. Was the rapidity of the gallant Marchese's advance brought to a stop at that point of his operations? Was the attempt to win Maddalena's love a much longer and more arduous one than those former stages of the business in hand had proved?

Shall I risk injuring poor Maddalena in the opinion of English wives and maidens, if I tell the truth, and admit that in this part of the business in hand also Malatesta's progress was rapid? I hope not; for, in truth, I do not think that she merits their cold shoulder. She had no idea of any reason why she should not give her love when it was sought by one who seemed to deserve it; and far less any notion why, when it had been given, she should deny the fact. And let it be

remembered how effulgently glorious an apparition the handsome and brilliant young Marchese must have seemed when he entered within the circle of that wan and dismal life! To the imagination of Maddalena, stored with forms of beauty, and to her heart, filled with ideals of the noble and the poetic, which she had never hitherto beheld incarnated, it seemed as if this sky-dropped visitor were *the one* destined embodiment of all her dreams of perfection, come at last, at once as a justification and an explanation of all those half-uncomprehended heart-cravings which had been recognised only as making felt the want of something which the pale monotony of her life did not confain.

It would be mere affectation, too, to deny that the social position of her lover had its influence over Maddalena's imagination; not as regarding in any way the influence that position might exercise on her own future lot, but as contributing its part to the splendour that dazzled her. The wisdom of many generations of grey-bearded sages has, we are all aware, been concentrated into pithy samples for round-hand copy-books, on purpose to warn inexperienced youth against over-valuing such brilliancy. But poor Maddalena had not had the

advantage of even such sententious teaching. And does it succeed in putting old heads on the young shoulders even of those who sup the fullest of it ? Is it even desirable that it should succeed in checkmating Nature's arrangements by such an achievement ? Does not the bitter "*Vanitas vanitatum, omnia Vanitas !*" find its fitting place at the conclusion rather than at the opening of the chapter ?

But should not her heart have told her that

The rank is but the guinea stamp,  
The man's the gold for a' that?

True ! and Maddalena had sufficient nobleness of nature to have recognised the value of the dictum in its utmost fulness, had it ever been offered to her intelligence. But experience of the possibility of false guineas must have preceded in the poet's mind the above expression of his thought. To Maddalena's ignorance of the world and its ways, "the stamp" was a proof of the recognition by others of the purity of the gold, and its fitting declaration and ornament.

But might not the poet's thought be pushed a little farther ? Might it not with equal truth and wisdom be asserted that those dark liquid eyes, those raven locks, and that sweet smile, were but

the “guinea stamp,” and that something more inseparable from the man than such separable accidents was “the gold for a’ that”? For Dame Nature is in this matter as arrant a forger as ever stamped pinchbeck. And nobody is deceived by her tricks in this sort, except——those, whom for some good reason of her own, it must be concluded, she seems specially to aim at deceiving. And they give implicit credence to the old lady’s credentials, and will continue to do so, despite our text-books, and the shakings of grey heads.

So Maddalena was dazzled, wooed, and won.

And then had come serious meditations on the part of the conquering hero, in what shape and guise he should attempt to possess himself of the prize. Such meditations are often deferred until the winning shall have been accomplished, with a more or less successful attempt on the part of those engaged in that pleasant sport to figure to themselves that the goal towards which they are running is an avowable one. But in the case of the Marchese Malatesta it had never once occurred to him to imagine for an instant, while engaged in winning the heart of Maddalena, that any matter connected with the choice of a future Marchesa

Malatesta was in question. He knew perfectly well that the individual destined for that position had been long ago selected, and was duly waiting for the fulness of time away there in distant Fermo; that two great and noble families throughout all their ramifications would be thrown into confusion and convulsions of astonishment, indignation, and distress, if he were to fail in duly carrying out the family arrangements; and that all this trouble would be intensified into horror if he were to dream of insulting the family of his destined bride, and disgracing his own, by bringing home such a person as Maddalena Tacca in the character of Marchesa Malatesta. All this he knew; and could not be said to have weighed the difficulties thus placed in his path, only because it had never entered his head for an instant to combat them.

Nevertheless, he had become aware, during the period of his acquaintance with Maddalena, of a half-comprehended something, which warned him of the hopelessness of bringing his pursuit to any other successful issue. It was not that any shadow of an appearance of being on her guard, or the smallest symptom of preparation for defence, was

perceptible in her conduct or manner. On the contrary, there was the most unmistakable absence of the remotest suspicion of any other possibility in the future than one. It was this, perhaps, even more than the perfect purity of her own mind and consciousness, which made the case, as Cesare said to his friend Carlo Mancini, so very difficult a one.

But this was not the only difficulty in his path. Though, somewhat to his surprise, he had found Maddalena so naïvely ignorant of the necessities of his position, and so unsuspecting of evil, it never entered his head to imagine that Varani could be liable to any mistakes or delusions on the subject. If he felt that he could not venture to let any dis honouring word fall on her ear, he never dreamed of thinking it necessary to be equally cautious with him. He had no reason for thinking that Varani would regard his "*amourette*" with Maddalena in any spirit of morality different from that generally professed, even if not always practised, by young men in a country where strict notions of duty as regards the relations between the sexes do not characterise the general tone of society. Still less could he imagine that he should find in the shy and diffident poor student one not only disinclined

to sympathise with and assist his views in the matter, but a firm and irremovable obstacle in the way of them, prepared to resist and prevent them at all risks and at whatsoever cost. During the earlier stages of his progressing intimacy with Maddalena, he had observed nothing in Varani's manner or conduct save a certain restlessness and uneasy watchfulness, which he had attributed to a jealousy exquisitely comic to his thinking, and the fun of which nothing would have prevented him from sharing with his associates, save the desirability of not calling the attention of any of them to the object of the chase he was engaged in for his own behoof. But the first careless hint of his purpose to Varani was met by poor Pietro in a manner that made him comprehend at once, to his indignant astonishment, that here was an opponent in his path not to be got rid of by violence or menace, and whose position in the midst of Maddalena's home surroundings made it equally out of the question to keep him in ignorance of his proceedings.

It appeared necessary to the truthfulness of this narrative that Varani should be presented to the mind of the reader such as he really appeared to the eyes of those among whom he lived; and this

was accordingly honestly done in the preceding chapter. But having thus introduced Pietro, nothing extenuating, though assuredly setting down naught in malice, I confess that I have shrunk from the attempt of interesting my readers, however "gentle," in any story of his hapless love. No one among them can be more gentle than was Maddalena; yet it never occurred to her to imagine that "poor Pietro" could look on her, or indeed on any other girl, with eyes of love. But, alas!—to quote the grand old chant of Burns yet once again—"A man's a man for a' that." And though Pietro scarcely ever dared to confess to himself that he had been guilty of the audacity of loving such a creature as Maddalena, and far—very far—less had dreamed of ever betraying the deeply buried secret to any other, and least of all to the object of his passion, he was doomed, and knew that he was doomed, to walk his solitary way through the unsunned paths of life, laden, in addition to so many other heavy burdens, by the irremovable sorrow of an utterly hopeless love.

Sympathy is a luxury most largely afforded to those whose need for it is the least urgent. And when I wish, gentle dames, to draw on the sacred

source of your pitying tears, I will paint the sorrows of an Apollo, and not those of such a stepson of Nature as poor Pietro Varani. Very little, therefore, shall be said here of the suffering with which the poor student had watched not only the progress of Malatesta's devotion to Maddalena, but far worse, that of her awakened love for him, and of the marvellously, portentously—as it seemed to him, and yet, as he every hour told himself—but too naturally rapid development of it.

Enough of this! Suffice it, that having felt during the progress of their love that he was without either the right or the power to interfere with it in any way, he had also had the instinctive delicacy to feel, when the time came that made it necessary for him—even him, in default of any other—to stand between Maddalena and destruction, that he had no right or claim to take upon himself the character of her Paladin and protector; that to assume the airs of such in the eyes of their little world would throw over her a portion of the ridicule, the shafts of which he could have braved in such a matter himself. But yet the evil must at all costs be averted. If deeds had to be done, they must be so done that no bystander should

guess their motive. If words might suffice, they must be few, and so spoken, as to be and to remain between him and the foe. The words had been few, and not, as may be imagined, eloquently uttered. But they *did* suffice. And these were the “virtuous remonstrances” to which Malatesta had referred in his conversation on the hill of *La Madonna di San Luca*; and hence the “awakening of his better nature,” as Varani was fain to think it, which had led to that conversation.

## CHAPTER III.

## ARCADES AMBO.

SHORTLY after Malatesta's return to the city from his walk to La Madonna di San Luca, he joined his friend Carlo Mancini, not at one of the cheaper taverns at which the rank and file of the students are in the habit of dining, but at a somewhat more aristocratic hostelry, where rather choicer fare, and specially a much greater degree of privacy, were to be found. The two young patricians had agreed to dine together, that Malatesta might communicate to his confidant the result of the conversation with Varani.

“ All right, old fellow ! ” cried Cesare, as he entered the room where they were to dine, and where he found Carlo waiting for him.

“ Oh ! here you are ! It is all right, is it ? I am

exceedingly glad to hear it, and shall be more glad to have my dinner. What the devil were you so long about? One would think you had been discounting your penance for the sin you are meditating at our Lady's shrine."

"Time enough for that when the sin has been committed. I thought I should never have got here. It is slow work talking to that *contadinaccio*\* Varani; and I had to go at his pace, you understand."

"I understand very little about it, except that you want me to do a job, my reward for which is likely to be a residence of some weeks in the delightful and improving society of a community of begging friars, and that I am to be honoured by having the *contadinaccio* in question for my colleague in the business."

"Well! that is about the state of the case as far as it goes, Carlo *mio*, I confess. But, in the first place, it will not be very difficult to avoid the result you seem to appreciate the advantages of so imperfectly; and as to the second point, you might guess that I have not made the selection without

\* The abusive form of *contadino*—a peasant; as one might say, a brutish boor of a peasant.

sufficient motive. You do not suppose that I have anything to do with such an animal as that from choice?"

"Well! I should have thought not! But I want to have a complete programme of the little comedy you propose presenting to 'the refined public and illustrious garrison' of Bologna, as the playbills say. For, to tell you the truth, though my friendship for you may enable me to get over the fear of the Signor Delegato and his myrmidons, and to face the possibilities of reclusion in a monastery, there is another fear in the matter which gives me far more uneasiness."

"What do you mean?" asked Malatesta, quickly.

"Why, I mean this. It seems to me that you are getting into dangerously deep water. You are going into this affair in a manner that, in my humble judgment, seems likely to turn a comedy into a very serious drama, if not into a tragedy. What will the Marchese Salvadore, your respected father, say to me, and what will my own father say to me, if I aid and abet you in marrying yourself in sad and serious earnest to a little nobody, without a penny or a name, that any one ever heard of?"

"Carlo *mio*," returned Cesare, finishing his

soup, and pausing to fill and drink a glass of wine before he replied, "you do me less than justice, and show less knowledge of your friend than I thought you possessed. Do you think I do not know, to the full as well as you, all the piece of work there would be, not at Fermo only, but at Rome too, if I were to be guilty of such an absurdity as you speak of. Heaven help me ! I should as soon think of requesting my uncle the Cardinal to perform the ceremony for me himself!"

"What in the devil's name, then, do you want of witnesses and all the rest of it?"

"Have a little patience, and give me credit in the mean time for knowing pretty tolerably well what I am about. I cannot begin my explanation better than by referring to the first marvel that was incomprehensible to your simple mind. Why do I submit to the disgust of walking and talking with that hideous boor Varani, and why are you to have such an animal for your companion in the service I ask from you ? Perhaps it might seem sufficient to observe that it was only by making acquaintance with this Pietro Varani that I obtained access to Maddalena ; that his intimacy with her

mother, and the close neighbourhood of the two families, have made it impossible that my relations with her should be any secret to him ; and that by inducing him to be my other witness I avoided taking yet another person into my confidence. But there was another reason for my selection ; and now, if you want to understand the whole of my programme, as you say, you will mark what that other reason was."

"Get on, my boy ! You make as many words about nothing as a friar preaching his maiden sermon. Cut it short, if I am to profit by it."

"Diavolo ! if you want to understand the state of the case, I must make it intelligible to you, I suppose. And yet the thing is plain enough, too. Maddalena, you see, double-distilled darling as she is, has, like many women, specially in her class of life, a mass of prejudices, which make her perfectly unreasonable. She owns she loves me. She does not doubt my devotion to her. She knows what my position and standing are. And yet she will listen to nothing unless she is addressed, *per Dio !* on the same terms on which I should, and, worse luck, shall, address that not particularly attractive paragon of perfection, the noble Countess

Cecilia Sampieri, who is destined, in due time, to become the Marchesa Malatesta."

"You don't mean that your little double-distilled darling really expects you to marry her?"

"Upon my life, I do mean it; and she most fully expects it."

"Oh, brava La Maddalena! I begin to have a juster appreciation of the doubled-distilled darling's *savoir faire*, and a clearer comprehension of her devoted affection!"

"No, Carlo! there you are out! You may be as cynical as you please; but I know that she does love me, and would——"

"——go the extent of suffering herself to be made Marchesa Malatesta to prove it. I understand."

"I tell you, you *don't* understand. She is utterly unreasonable, very ignorant of what is possible and what is not possible; and capable, I verily do believe, of breaking her own heart and mine by separating herself from me rather than consent to any union save a formal marriage, with all the ceremonies and legal consequences."

"Devil doubt her!"

"So you see," continued Cesare, without heed-

ing the interruption, “that, under the circumstances, there is nothing for it in both our interests, save to please her with the appearance of a marriage for the satisfaction of her scruples.”

“Appearance of a marriage!” exclaimed Carlo; “but it seems to me that you are going to make the appearance most uncommonly like the real thing. Allow me to recommend to your serious consideration the fate of the mountebank, a few years back, who was making believe to hang himself, and who did the trick so thoroughly that it could never be undone again!”

“If I don’t manage my affairs better than he did, you shall call me a bungler,” rejoined Cesare, laughing. “Look here, wiseacre, and see if I don’t know a trick worth two of the mountebank’s. You know what a clandestine marriage is, and how it is made?”

“Yes, *per Bacco!* and I know that the knot so tied is tied as fast as if all the priests, and altars, and books, and candles in Rome went to the tying of it!”

“Oh, you simple-minded innocent! what is necessary to the making of the marriage besides the priest?”

“A couple of witnesses, as I know to my cost!”

“And what are the requisites necessary for the witnesses?”

“Ears and eyes, I suppose,” said Carlo, opening wide his own.

“And what else?” persisted Cesare.

“Nothing else that I know of! Come! what is it you mean? I am a bad hand at guessing riddles!”

“Why, you most simple and ingenuous youth! the witnesses must be *of legal age*, to be sure!”

“By Jupiter!” cried Carlo, starting up, and evincing a much stronger degree of interest in the conversation than he had hitherto manifested, “that is a dodge indeed. And what if the witnesses are not of full age?”

“If either of the witnesses be not of full age, he is not a witness.”

“Bravo!”

“And if the words are not said before the two witnesses required by the canon, it is just the same thing as if they were never said!”

“Bravissimo!”

“And the marriage is nothing but a joke, and no marriage at all! And now does your wisdom

begin to think that Cesare Malatesta knows what he is about as well as most people?"

"But I am of full age, Cesare, you know!"

"I know it, perfectly well! But Pietro Varani is *not*."

"Now I begin to come in sight of port!"

"Ah! a light begins to break upon your obfuscated mind at length; eh, Carlo *mio*? I think that will do, won't it?"

"A dozen auditors of the Ruota\* could not have planned it better. But did you ask that oaf Varani about his age?"

"Why, what do you take me for? Am I a simpleton, a greenhorn? What! prepare beforehand evidence against myself! *Grazie!*† No! that is not the way I go to work. A sly peep surreptitiously obtained of the Dean of Faculty's Matriculation Book struck me as the surest and safest way of obtaining the necessary information. Pietro Varani was born on the 29th of September, in the year 1807. Can you draw from that fact any conclusion as to his age at this present speaking?"

\* The supreme tribunal at Rome.

† *Thanks!* An expression continually used ironically by Italians.

“ Well ! I suppose one might in the course of time. Let’s see. September, 1807, to September, 1827, must be about twenty years ; and from September, 1827, to March, 1828, is—October, November, December, January, February, and one finger more for March, that’s six—yes, six months. I should say that the creature must be twenty years and six months old.”

“ Galileo could not have solved the problem more accurately. Therefore our Varani is not of legal age ; therefore he is no witness to the marriage ; therefore the marriage is all moonshine—a mighty pretty light for playing in, is your moonshine, by the way!—therefore I shall be free to enter into the bond of lawful, and, doubtless, proportionably holy wedlock, with the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri, whenever the necessity for accomplishing that destiny shall overtake me—Q. E. D. Can your wisdom pick any hole in that ? ” concluded Malatesta, triumphantly.

“ No ! the plan seems a good plan,” said Carlo, nodding his head slowly, and speaking with consideration ; “ I do not see any hole in it.”

“ And now I hope you see, too, the special fitness of this Varani for the purpose I mean to put

him to. There are plenty of fellows under age who would not have refused to do me this little service. But, how would it have been when the bubble bursts? It would have looked very much as if the bubble had been of my intentional blowing. If I bring a youngster, a friend of my own, whose age I must be supposed to know, and ought at all events to have ascertained, I am to blame. I run my head into no such nooses. I take for the second witness the intimate friend of the family, whom they have known for years; a fellow, too, who looks as much like forty as twenty! It is, in fact, *they* who bring him as *their* witness; who must naturally be presumed to know his age, and who, at all events, ought to have looked to it. I take care that *my* witness, your revered self, shall be of as much discretion as years can make him; which, though not saying much, is sufficient for the purpose. Don't you see the beauty of it? Don't you see how the position of this Varani as regards Maddalena's family pulls me through scot free?"

"Admirable! Upon my life, it's masterly. *Davvero,\* Cesare*, I didn't give you credit for such

\* Truly.

a headpiece. Machiavelli might have been proud of you for a pupil. But—one more word. Is there no danger that they *may* look to it, as you say, and hit the blot?"

"*Che!*" replied Cesare, with a prolonged intonation of the versatile particle, which expressed a whole battery of scoffs at the possibility suggested. "*They!* who are *they*? Old mother Tacca, who is likely to have about as accurate notions of canon law as you have of the penitential psalms; who thinks a marriage is a marriage, and one with a live Marchese specially sure to be all right and proper. Or Maddalena herself, the truthful little darling! who, if I were to tell her that a good and valid marriage was made by singing *Casta Diva* at midnight to the full moon, would never feel a shadow of doubt about the matter. Or, lastly, do you fear the sagacity and shrewdness of that half-witted creature, Varani? Trust me, any such misgiving would be a bit of practical sense far above him!"

(And if it was equally far *beneath* him to suspect such a deception, it answered Cesare Malatesta's purpose equally well.)

"No, no; never fear!" continued he; "and,

besides, if the doubt had struck him, would he not have mentioned it when I asked him to be the witness ? Why, I put the text of the law into his hand, the great oaf !—taking care, of course, that he did not read farther than the exact passage I meant him to read. And, by-the-by, the fact of my having done so may be usefully remembered in its proper time and place. No, no ! it's all right, I tell you ; and as safe as if it were done."

" But, I say, Cesare, talking of being of full age, *you* are under age, you know. Would not that make the marriage void of itself ?"

" Not a bit of it ! In the regular way, the priest would refuse to marry a minor without the consent of his parents. But if he *does* do it, it is done for good, and past all undoing. And that's canon law, and Gospel too, I suppose."

" And when is it to come off ? and where ? and how ? "

And then Cesare explained to his friend all the details of the plan, as he had previously told them to Verani; speaking the truth, however, on one point, which he had represented falsely on the former occasion. He had told Varani that Madalena had already consented to the plan of the

clandestine marriage. This was not the case. It had not as yet been proposed to her. Cesare intended to do so that same evening; and felt sure, as he told his friend, of meeting with no obstacle in that quarter.

About an hour later, the young men, who had deemed it prudent to change the topic of their conversation, while they were enjoying their coffee and cigars at a *café* in the *piazza* behind the vast barn-like cathedral of San Petronio, separated; and Cesare betook himself to the sombre old house in the *piazza* of San Domenico, with the intention of explaining (as far as might be advisable) his scheme to Maddalena, and receiving, as he doubted not, her delighted consent to it.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SERPENT AND THE DOVE.

MALATESTA found Maddalena alone with her mother in their little sparely furnished sitting-room as usual—as had been usual of late; for since his visits had become constant, and he had assumed the position of the acknowledged and accepted lover of Maddalena, Varani had, with shrinking scrupulousness, abstained from giving any opportunity for those varied studies, which used often in that old time, so far back in the past—nearly two months ago!—to bring him into the widow Tacca’s room of an evening.

The widow and her daughter were alone. Maddalena had sprung to the door as soon as her strained ear had caught the sound of the now well-

known footfall on the first flight of the third-floor staircase, and had run with the little Roman lamp in her hand to meet him on the midway landing-place—only to give him the benefit of a glimmer of light in that Cimmerian darkness!—only for that, positively. But that little welcoming service had come to be an institution, to which both of the lovers attached no little importance. How, indeed, as Maddalena had said to her mother, could any one find their way up that horrid staircase in the utter darkness? The widow Tacca had felt that the credit of her domicile was called in question by this confession of one of its weak points; and guarding with far forecasting prudence against the possible promulgation of the damnable and heretical theory, that it was the duty of the third-floor lodgers to light the darksome way which led to their abode, had remarked in reply to Maddalena's little plea in justification of her nightly trip down to the first landing-place, that Signor Varani had always found his way up in the dark very well. But Maddalena had replied that “that was so different!” So the excursions to the top of the second flight were voted absolutely necessary; and the little feet flew down the stairs with an elastic

spring in their movements which could not have been observed in them a couple of months before ; and a new light played like a lambent flame in the eyes that greeted her lover as he climbed the stair, and pretended to be out of breath, to make an excuse for protracting those precious moments on the landing-place.

All this little ceremony of reception, with its usual accompaniments, was duly performed on the evening in question. No interruption occurred to mar the perfect fitness of the opportunity for making the communication to Maddalena, which her lover had come determined to make ; and yet he did not appear to be in any hurry to enter on the subject. The old lady sat, as usual, half dozing over her knitting. It could hardly have been that Cesare felt her presence as a restraint. And yet, somehow or other, he felt that he would rather she were not there. There was something in that which he had to say, that made it seem more desirable to say it *a quattr' ochi*,\* as he expressed it to his friend Carlo.

So he deferred his communication till they

\* "With four eyes ;" a common Italian phrase, equivalent to *tête-à-tête*.

should meet in the church of San Domenico on the following morning. Many a time, since Malatesta had established himself on the footing of an intimate acquaintance in the widow's family, the little-frequented aisles of the neighbouring church, or the still less frequented cloister,\* had served the lovers as a trysting-place. There is on the eastern wall of the latter a sepulchral stone, remarkable among all the others around it. It is a huge slab of red marble, bearing the effigy of a knight in chain armour, admirably well cut in high relief. The hands are resting on the hilt of a huge two-handed sword; there is a couchant lion at the feet, and the face is one of very striking nobility and beauty. There is a long inscription in Gothic letters below the feet of the recumbent figure, which had often been a source of curiosity and awe to Maddalena. She felt certain that the history preserved in these mysterious characters must be one favourable to the dead, for the marble record of the noble face and figure were abundantly legible to her. This stone, which had so often oc-

\* There is an inner cloister within the "*clausura*" of the convent; and of course, therefore, inaccessible to females. But there is also an outer cloister, which is not within the above-named limit, and is open to the public.

cupied her speculative gazing, marked Maddalena's favourite spot in the cloister—more so henceforward than ever. For it was precisely there that she had received the first explicit declaration of love from Malatesta; and she cherished the fancy in her silly little head, that her lover was clearly just such another *preux chevalier* as he who slept below; for had he not the same noble expression, the same majestic presence. And was there not haply something more than mere chance in the coincidence that he should first have asked her love on the spot where she had so often yearned for the sympathy of some such noble heart. It was just on that spot, as Maddalena well remembered when revisiting it after long years, that Cesare had asked for her love, which he might well know he had already made his own, and had received the ungrudging and frank acknowledgment that it was so. And since that day the eastern cloister walk had been the favourite meeting-place of the lovers.

Cesare had as yet said no word to her directly and unequivocally of marriage; but Maddalena had conceived the proffer of his love to include and to be, in fact, an offer of marriage, as much as if all the details of the ceremony had

been talked over. And all their subsequent conversations had proceeded on the tacit assumption on her part, that that was, as a matter of course, the goal they were approaching ; and this it was which had made the part Cesare had to play seem to him, as he had said to Carlo Mancini, such a difficult one.

Why could not Cesare bring himself to tell Maddalena the story he had prepared then and there in the presence of her mother, who, as he had truly said, was little likely to have any such knowledge as could lead her to make an objection to aught which it might please him to say ? He knew well enough that Maddalena was awaiting, not impatiently, but still expectingly, some such communication from him. He was well assured that no difficulty would be raised by her. And yet there was a secret consciousness, which led him to defer till the morrow the explanation he had to make, at the cost of severe self-reproach as he walked home that night, for a cowardice which, as he said to himself, was not like him, and which he had never known before.

So it was, however. And the evening in the sombre little room on the third floor, lighted by

one wick of the tall slender brass lamp, which enabled the widow to see her knitting, and by the moonlight, which streamed in from the curtainless window, ended, as many a previous one had ended, by a whispered appointment for a meeting in the eastern cloister walk the next morning.

And of course the difficulties of descending the dark staircase were no less than those attending the climbing of it; and the ceremony of the escort, with the tall lamp held high by the ring handle at its summit, while the widow was left in the dark, had to be repeated.

“To-morrow, then, *amor mio*, at nine, when the monks will all be in the choir, and the beggars at the convent-gate; punctually at nine!” said Cesare.

“Did I ever keep you waiting, *Signor mio?*” whispered a sweetly-cadenced silvery voice in reply, while the shake of the forefinger with which the remonstrance had to be enforced, necessitated the setting down of the lamp on the last stair of the flight ascending from the landing-place, on which the last good night was to be spoken.

“Never, darling, since that happy day when we

took the old knight in chain armour into our confidence, and both whispered a secret to him to keep ; but, before that day, I have waited many a long hour, sometimes watching the door of the house from behind the tomb of the Foscherari,\* there in the Piazza, and sometimes mooning disconsolately up and down the aisle of that gloomy old church.”

“ Ah ! that was because you had no business to be waiting there at all ! And of course I could not have the slightest idea that anybody was watching for me !”

“ Of course not ! how should you ?” replied Cesare, in the same tone, but yet with a just perceptible shade of expression in it, which would have sounded unpleasantly on a more experienced ear, though it fell quite harmlessly on those innocent ones to which it was addressed.

“ But now, dearest, you must let me go !” said

\* One of two remarkable sepulchres in the Piazza di San Domenico. The other is that of a learned lawyer of the thirteenth century. Both these remarkable monuments consist of a marble sarcophagus elevated on slender marble columns some seven or eight feet in height. The Foscherari family became extinct in the thirteenth century.

Maddalena, suddenly awakened to the necessity of returning with the lamp to her mother; “what will mamma think?”

“Probably that she has more need of the lamp to knit by than we have for——doing what she did once, and what she knows very well that we are doing now.”

“Hush! for Heaven’s sake! I don’t believe that anybody ever did such a thing before in the world!” whispered Maddalena into his ear, as she snatched up her lamp, preparatory to tripping hastily up the stairs.

“At nine to-morrow, then!” he repeated; and received for answer a kiss wafted to him from the tips of her fingers, as she stood on the topmost step, holding her lamp over the banisters to give him the benefit of its glimmer for yet one further stage of the long way down.

“What a sweet, loving, artless darling she is!” thought Malatesta to himself, as he walked home-wards. “I wish—I swear I do wish with all my heart—that I was going to make a marriage of it in earnest! And to leave her for the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri! Per Bacco! it is a queer world. But I shall do no such thing. Every one knows

what marriage means. I shall marry Cecilia Sampieri of course, just as I shall do all the other tiresome things one has to do. There is the gloomy old family palace, too; but I am not bound to be a prisoner in it. I know of a pleasant home. There will be the Contessa Cecilia and the family palace—very well matched; and the *casino* and my precious little darling—well matched too. A man's wife is much like the great state carriage and the family liveries, and ought to be brought out on the same occasions. Little Maddalena will have the better lot of the two after all!"

And with such comfort to his conscience as could be extracted from such meditations he went the next morning to his rendezvous in the cloister.

He was very fairly punctual to the hour named, but Maddalena was there before him. He found her standing on her favourite spot by the tomb-stone of the mailed knight, gazing at the finely-cut marble features in an attitude and with an expression of pensiveness that appeared to him out of place on the occasion.

"Why, Lena!" he cried, as he came up to her, "you look as if you were come here to pay off a

long score of penances, rather than to meet one who loves you more than all the world beside! Have you never a warming smile for this chilly morning?"

"Do you know, *cor mio*," she said, putting out both hands to meet his, "that though a great love is a happy thing—oh, so happy!—it is not always, as it seems to me, in tune with light and merry thoughts. But just now I was only dreaming over all sorts of silly fancies, as I used to do in old times here and in the church. I was thinking whether that cavalier, who lived so many hundred years ago, had loved, and married, and whether his wife was happy, and whether she lay buried anywhere near him;—and thinking that the love and the happiness and the parting were all over now! Silly thinkings, were they not, my own love?" she added, as her features relaxed into the sunny smile he loved to see on them.

"That looks like my own Lena!" said he, stealing an arm round her waist, and snatching a hasty kiss, while a quick glance along the cloister assured him that there were no prying eyes within eye-shot; "and is, I flatter myself, the look most fitted to listen to what I have to say to you this morning.

For I have something very important to tell my Lena. Don't be alarmed."

"Alarmed at anything you can have to say to me, dearest ! I know right well that if it were unpleasant you would not say it. You would keep it all for yourself. But that is not what must be between us, you know ! I must share the bitters as well as the sweets !"

"One would think that she was married to me already !" was the thought that passed through Cesare's head, but the words that came from his tongue were, "But this time, my own, there is no bitter in the case. I flatter myself that what I have to say will please you ; and this it is : I have at length, I think, succeeded in removing all the difficulties in the way of our marriage, and can venture to ask you to become my wife."

Cesare had expected that this announcement would have been received with an outburst of rejoicing and gratitude, and he was not a little surprised, and somewhat disconcerted, when Maddalena innocently said in reply : "Were there then difficulties, Cesare *mio* ? And I knew nothing of them ! See now ! it was not for nothing that I told you but now that I make claim to share

the troubles as well as the pleasures of your life. What difficulties stood in the way, dearest?"

"Why, you don't suppose, you can't suppose, Maddalena——" and Cesare was on the point of uttering what might, even then, truly and passionately as Maddalena loved him, have put an end to everything between them. But he checked himself in time, and added, "You must remember that I am not of age, and of course that puts some difficulties in the way."

"What difficulties, Cesare?" asked Maddalena, looking up inquiringly into his face.

"Why, the ordinary rule would be that I must have my father's consent; and there is no hope that he would give it. I am not happily circumstanced in my home, dearest! My father is an ambitious, worldly man. He has set his heart on compelling me to marry one whom I cannot love, and whom, since I have known you, it seems sacrilege to me to think of marrying."

"But will it be possible, my beloved, to marry—will it be right to marry against the will of your father?" inquired Maddalena, gravely.

"That it is possible, there can be no doubt whatever; whether it is right or not you shall

yourself be the judge. It is certain that I must marry against his consent, or do what you cannot think it would be right for me to do—marry a woman I abhor ! Remember that when I come of age, it will be equally against his will that I marry any one save the woman he is bent on having for a daughter-in-law, because of the property she will bring into the family. Remember that what may be done now merely *without* his consent, if done afterwards, must be done *against* his consent, and in despite of his protest. Remember, also, that not even by remaining unmarried can I meet his wishes at all the more. Surely, when you think of these things, you cannot doubt that I am justified in making my happiness in such a matter without reference to unreasonable wishes, which it would be wicked to comply with."

But, you spoke of having removed difficulties, Cesare. How have any difficulties been removed ? ”

“ I should rather have said, Lena, that I have succeeded in ascertaining that they do not exist. I find that we can be married, and that by no less a personage than the Cardinal Archbishop himself, without any eonsent save our own.”

"And of that I think we may make sure!" said Maddalena, with a shy, yet trustful glance, that spoke a whole world of tender affection and undoubting confidence.

"If only we have yours, my Lena, all is settled," returned Cesare, supposing that she had spoken of consenting to the mode of marriage proposed, whereas she had merely meant to speak of the unalterableness of their common affection.

Cesare had said no more than the truth, however, when he had boasted to Carlo Mancini that Maddalena would accept as a sufficiently proved fact whatever he chose to assert to her. She did feel that rebellion against the tyranny of which her lover accused his father was justifiable; and she did not feel that any duty required her to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of helping to force her lover into a detestable and loveless union. "But, Cesare," she added, in reply to his last words, "will the Archbishop marry us in that manner?"

"He cannot help doing so, my sweet Lena!" replied Cesare; "he has not the right to refuse. This is the way it is done. The parties go before him anywhere you like, and anywhere that you can

find him, and mutually declare that they take each other for husband and wife, in the presence of two witnesses, and the business is done."

"Is that really all?" said Maddalena, with a naïve surprise, but without a shadow of doubt in her mind. "Is that a sacrament? The catechism says, you know, that marriage is a sacrament; and I fancied that it must be done in a church, and that there would be kneeling down before the altar, and a mass, and a ring, and I don't know what besides."

"All that is for pomp's sake, my Lena, just as the carriages and the liveries and the music and the feasting afterwards are. And all these things are very fitting for those who marry mainly that the world may see them doing it. But we, who marry for our own happiness, and who wish only the solemn sanction of the Church on our heartfelt vow to dedicate ourselves thenceforth for ever to the love and happiness of each other, we have no need of calling the impertinent world to witness our vows. Proper witnesses are necessary. The law and the Church require the presence of two. And it is very right and proper that so solemn a contract should be duly and formally wit-

nessed by persons who, if need should ever arise—in case, for instance, of the death of either of us—may be able to speak to the validity of the marriage. Though even if they were not there to do so, if they were to die, there would always remain the formal and legal record in the archives of the bishopric. Nevertheless, for greater security and certainty, the law requires the presence of two witnesses, and I have already taken care to be provided with them. The one will be an old and trusted friend of my own and of my family, the Conte Carlo Mancini of Macerata, a man whose character and position in the world makes him all that could be most desired for the purpose. For the other, I have thought, dearest, that I should be doing what was agreeable to yourself and your good mother in the matter, by selecting your own old and valued friend, Varani."

"How good of you, my love, to think of that! But you are always good and thoughtful," said Maddalena, looking up into his face with a fond smile, and a slight, quickly passing increase of colour in her cheeks. "Yes," she continued, "I am sure that will please mamma; she has such a

high opinion of, and such confidence in, our friend Pietro. And he is such a good, honest-hearted creature; though he is," she added, glancing furtively at her lover's face with a laugh in her eye, accompanied by a barely perceptible little squeeze of the arm on which her own was resting, "such a strange, uncouth being to look at. Yes ! I shall be glad to have good Pietro Varani for the second witness."

" Ay ! I thought, dearest, that his presence would give you additional assurance, that——"

" Nay, my own, it is your presence must give me that. I want no one's presence to give me assurance when you are by. But, knowing us all, as he does, it seems as if he was the right person for it."

" Just so. That is exactly it;—evidently the proper person as your friend."

" And, as you say, I think it will please poor mamma. I have tried to make her understand, and, indeed, she does feel very strongly all your goodness and your worth. Still, you know, it may be possible, my own, that she does not feel as if she knew you quite as I know you (here another

little pressure of the arm); and she may feel a satisfaction in putting her child into the hands of such an old and trusted friend."

"That was exactly what I felt," said Cesare, who, well as he had played the part he had chalked out for himself, had not escaped several sharp twitches of the heart-strings at certain points of the above colloquy; "I never imagined that my little Lena would need any other protector, guide, or friend, than her own, own Cesare."

"Never! either on this or any other occasion. Never, my husband!" said Maddalena, with an almost solemn earnestness. "And now, my Cesare," she continued, in a lighter tone, "you must explain to me all about it—what you propose, and when it is to be, and how it is to be done, remembering all the time that your little loving Lena is as ignorant of all that goes on in the world outside her own poor home as the birds in the hedges; nay, a great deal more so, for they are out in the sunshine all day long, and see a great deal, and I dare say are talking it all over among themselves when we hear them chattering so. But you don't know what a shut-up life mine has been, and that I hardly knew what sunshine was till you

came and made all bright—even the dull, dreary little room at home ! I know nothing about anything, understand. So now begin and tell me everything.”

And then Cesare, as they strolled slowly up and down the cloister, while she hung on his arm, keeping her eyes fixed on his face with an expression of submission as unbounded as if she were listening to the decrees of fate, proceeded to tell her in detail all the particulars of the plan he had already explained to Varani and to Carlo Mancini.

She hung on his words with fixed attention, uttering no syllable of comment, but expressing by her mobile features sometimes startled, and sometimes amused, but always wholly unmisgiving surprise.

“And that is really all ! and people can be married out in the open air in a garden in that way ! I think it is very nice—much nicer than in a gloomy church ! And the Cardinal will do it himself ! That sounds very grand ! Oh, my own best love ! to think that so vast, so wonderful a difference between all the dreary, dreary past and the bright, bright future can so easily be brought about !”

“ Ay, darling ! quickly to be done, and never to be undone !” said Cesare, sententiously, while the reflection occurred to him, that one lie was but one still, however much enlarged on and repeated.

“ And there will be nothing for poor Pietro to say ?” inquired Maddalena, with a roguish laugh in her eye ; “ I am glad of that, because you know he is not always ready to speak at the right moment, poor dear Pietro !”

“ No, no ! he will have nothing to do but to look with all his eyes, and listen with all his ears to what we say.”

“ And your friend the same ?”

“ And my friend the same. I have explained to you why it will be convenient to let it come off on a Saturday. You would think next Saturday too sudden, perhaps. But there can be nothing to prevent us from naming the following Saturday for the day that we are both to look back on as the most fortunate of our lives.”

“ Saturday week !” exclaimed Maddalena, with a sort of little catch in her breath, such as is caused by the first dash of a shower-bath ; “ that seems very sudden too, does it not, Cesare ?”

“ If you have any reason for wishing to put

off——” said Cesare, gravely, in a voice almost of displeasure.

“ Nay, my own love !” cried she, startled by the unwonted tone in his voice ; “ surely your will is my will ! I am your own—have I not given myself?—your own to do with as you please ! Nor must you think me unwilling or unready to be wholly yours because the unexpected nearness of the day startled me. Not so ! I have no wish to postpone the day. Let it be as you say !”

“ That is my own dear, gentle Lena ! Now you shall go, dearest, to tell your mother all about it—always remembering, by-the-by, that any such weather as should prevent the old Cardinal from taking his walk would necessarily constrain us to put off the ceremony till the next day, on which we can be sure of his going out to the gardens. You can talk it over also with your friend Varani ; you will find him quite well informed upon the subject.”

“ *Addio, angioletto mio !* ” she said, as they were about to part at the door of the darksome corridor leading from the cloister to the *piazza* ; “ not now ! the monks are coming out of the church,” she added, as she gave a little spring from his side.

“ You will meet me on the stairs, then, to-night, and not be in such a tremendous hurry to get back to the room as you always are ? ” said he, detaining her hand.

“ If you will behave discreetly, and not attempt to blow the lamp out ! *Addio, mio bene !* ”

“ *Addio, mio tesoro !* ”

And so Maddalena returned to tell her mother all the wonderful things she had heard, dwelling much on the part Varani was to act in the matter, which served to comfort and reassure the widow completely.

And Cesare went to join his friend Mancini, to tell him of his triumphant success.

## CHAPTER V.

## IN THE CONTINI GARDENS.

THE incumbency of the Archiepiscopal See of Bologna is a position of very exalted dignity and importance, and the Archbishop of the period in question was a very dignified man—genuinely such in respect of character and conduct as well as in person, manner, and outward appearance. The See is—or it may be more correct, perhaps, to say was—always held by a Cardinal; and, though not one of the richest preferments in the Church, the Archbishop was held, perhaps, to be the most important ecclesiastic with care of souls in Italy, out of Rome.

His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop was, at the time of which I am writing, a very aged man; but though the quiet walk in the avenue of the

Contini Gardens, which has been mentioned, was the extent of physical exertion of which he was still capable, time had neither weakened his faculties, nor in any degree diminished the venerable majesty of his presence. He was singularly tall, very thin, and even slender in person, and still perfectly upright. Though his step was slow it was still firm; and though his fine old head, with its long sparse silver locks, lofty forehead, and classical features, was apt to drop on his breast as he walked in meditative solitude, attended by a single chaplain, who walked some half a yard in the rear of his superior, he could raise it, if occasion offered, with an air of mild, yet authoritative dignity and venerable majesty, which could not but be felt as strongly impressive, even by the most light-minded.

The Saturday towards the latter end of March, which Cesare had fixed for the accomplishment of his project, was one of those lovely days which that period of the year often produces; as often, that is to say, as neither rain nor a *tramontana*\* occur to spoil them. The day in question was still, and warmed by a sunshine that, unlike the pale tenta-

\* The wind "across the mountains," i.e. the north wind.

tives of our northern spring-tide suns, which dazzle rather than warm, brought with it a veritable fore-taste of summer.

There could be no doubt that the Cardinal would take his walk on such an afternoon.

It was about two o'clock on that pleasant day when a hack carriage passed out of the gate called the Porta di Saragoza—the same from which the arcade leading up to the church of Madonna di San Luca commences its ascent—and leaving the long line of arches and the upward path to the left, pursued the road at the foot of the hill towards the Contini Villa. There were two young men, to Bolognese eyes evidently students, in the carriage, and though the Sunday, or other *festa*-day, was that more usually selected for such little excursions, there was nothing in any way remarkable in the circumstance, that the two holiday-makers should be tempted to enjoy the favourite drive on that lovely afternoon.

At the point where the road, which the hack carriage followed, parts from the arcade, which it accompanies after leaving the gate for about a quarter of a mile or so, there is a sort of little temple formed of four arches supporting a small

cupola, marking the angle at which the colonnade turns from the direction it has hitherto followed and begins to climb the side of the hill; so that the arcaded path to the church passes through the little building, and the road, which then takes a direction at right angles to the colonnade, continues outside of it and under the shadow of its wall. There, so placed behind that wall as to be hidden from those passing along the more frequented part of the road between the city gate and that point, and from any one pursuing the ascent to the church, was drawn up a travelling carriage, evidently ready for a journey, and waiting for its intended occupants. One of the two students said a word or two to the man who was half asleep on the driving seat, and was answered by a yawning "*Sta bene, Signore!*"\* and the two occupants of the hack carriage passed on.

About half an hour later another hack carriage drove out of the city, and drew up on the city side of the little temple-like elbow of the colonnade. From this Cesare and Maddalena descended, and dismissing the driver, entered the arcade as if about to walk up to the church. As soon as ever

\* "It is well,"—"All right, sir," as we should say.

the man had turned his vehicle, however, and had started on his way back to the city, they gave over that pretence, and running hastily round to the back of the building, jumped into the carriage waiting for them.

“The Conte Carlo and the other have passed on?” asked Cesare of the driver, who had evidently received his orders previously.

“*Lustrissimo! si.\** They have passed half an hour ago !”

“It is all right, Lena darling; we shall find them at their post. And I dare say his Eminence won’t be far behind us.”

“You must be very indulgent and bear with me, my own ! I keep on repeating to myself that I am with you, and that therefore I need fear nothing. Yet I am frightened and nervous, and I can’t help it. I keep on fancying all sorts of things;—that the Archbishop will not come—that

\* “Yes! most illustrious sir.” This title, which originally was accorded only to ducal rank, began in the eighteenth century to be abusively applied to all persons of rank, and finally to anybody whom the speaker wished to flatter. It was used indiscriminately with “Eccellenza.” Within quite the last few years a notable change may be observed in Italian manners in this respect. These titles, which used to meet one at every turn, are now comparatively rarely heard at all.

he will send us all to prison instead of marrying us —and all sorts of follies. Will you bear with your poor ignorant, cage-bred little Lena, and be very kind to her, and teach her and show her how to be worthy of being your wife, my own ? ”

Cesare passed his arm round her waist as they sat side by side in the back of the carriage, and murmured some words of endearment. But it was evident to any more experienced eye than Maddalena’s, that he was in a state of considerable nervousness himself. He continually stretched himself out of the carriage and looked back; again and again consulted his watch; and seemed in no mood to afford Maddalena the support she needed.

A very little more than half an hour’s drive brought them to the end of this the first stage of their journey. The carriages, which frequently on *festa* days brought holiday-makers from Bologna to the Contini Gardens, always drove up to the great iron gateway on one side of the front entrance to the villa, and so entered the gardens, which were always professedly on those days thrown open to the public by the liberality of the noble owners; and were never, in fact, shut to any who wished to enter on other days. But the

carriage which conveyed Cesare and Maddalena did not stop at this main entrance ; but passing on followed the road, which skirted the long garden-wall, and turned the angle at the farther end of it, till it came to a small door in the wall at the extremity of the grounds farthest from the city.

The spot was a very solitary one ; and, as such, well adapted for the purpose in hand. The carriage while waiting, drawn up under the wall on one side of the small rarely-used door, was little likely to be observed ; and the “ happy couple” whom it was intended to carry off far out of the reach of all prying eyes, as soon as “ the ceremony” to come off on the other side of the wall should have been completed, could rejoin it in a minute, as soon as the deed was done. The little door, in fact, opened not twenty paces from the ilex clump, which formed the circular arbour at the extremity of the avenue, where the Cardinal took his walk. Malatesta jumped from the carriage, said a few words to the driver, and turned to help Maddalena to alight. She was trembling, so that it was almost necessary to lift her from the carriage.

“ Courage, darling ! ” he whispered, as with one arm round her waist, and clasping her cold and

shaking hand in his, he drew her to the doorway.  
“ Courage ! all is going well ! A few minutes more, and we are man and wife ! I hope the old fellow will not keep us long waiting.”

“ I hope he will come ! ” murmured poor Maddalena.

“ Most likely he is in the garden by this time. So take care ! Not a syllable after we are on the other side of the wall. You know the words you have to say. That is all you have to think of. Take care he hears them, that is all.”

And so saying, he lifted the latch of the door, and in another moment had cautiously closed it behind them.

Immediately within it, close to the wall, they found Carlo Mancini and Pietro Varani waiting for them.

“ Has he come yet ? ” whispered Cesare in the ear of the former.

“ We have heard nothing. But we have not stirred from this spot. If you came at a fair pace, he can hardly be here yet ; for his Eminence’s fat, old, long-tailed blacks, take it very easily,” replied Carlo, in the same tone.

Maddalena had, meanwhile, exchanged a silent

pressure of the hand with Varani. His strangely-working features had manifested symptoms of getting themselves into order for speaking; but Malatesta had silenced him by an imperious gesture.

All four then proceeded to creep cautiously towards the arbour, listening for any sound of footsteps that might warn them of the Archbishop's approach. All was perfectly still, however, and they took up their position in the circular space in the centre of the clump of ilex, close by the side of the clipped green wall, and near the point at which the avenue opened into it; so that any person coming up the long walk from the other end of it could not see them till he had fully entered the arbour.

And so they waited what seemed to all four an interminable time. Maddalena clinging to Cesare's side, and grasping his arm with both her little trembling hands, bent her ear towards the ground, straining it to catch the sound of the expected footsteps which she dreaded, yet was nervously impatient to hear. Ever and anon she looked up wistfully into her lover's face, and longed to ask whether he had any misgiving as to the coming of the Archbishop; but remembering his caution, and deter-

mined to be obedient to the uttermost, she forbore to do so.

Malatesta was evidently nervous himself, though he strove hard to appear at his ease. He looked at his watch every minute ; and every time the breeze stirred a dry leaf in the avenue, fancied he heard the step he was waiting for. Carlo Mancini, dodging his head here and there, now on tiptoe, now crouching to the ground, was striving fruitlessly to catch a glimpse of the avenue through the thick clipped underwood of laurustinus and bay that formed the lower part of the hedges which shut it in ; while Varani, nervously rubbing together his great bony hands, as if he were continually washing them, stood with his head bent forwards, looking wistfully at Maddalena, and making a series of uncouth grimaces, which were intended to convey to her encouragement and exhortations of patience.

Maddalena's ear was the first to catch the sounds they were all so eagerly listening for. Suddenly she raised her head, and lifted a forefinger, looking at the same time so terrified, that Cesare, who could feel that her knees were shaking under her, feared that she would drop. In another instant, they all

plainly heard the sound of footsteps slowly approaching; and a minute later were able clearly to distinguish the footfalls of two walkers. Rapid glances passed between the four conspirators. Varani and Maddalena made a simultaneous movement, as if they were about to step forward into the open space and confront the approaching priests; but Carlo Mancini, who seemed most to have preserved his presence of mind, lifted his two outspread hands, with a repressing gesture, warning them all to remain still and mute till the right moment should have arrived. If the Archbishop were to catch sight of a party constituted as theirs was, in such a place and at such a time, a suspicion of the truth might very possibly flash upon him: and he would then unquestionably do his best to defeat their purpose. Even if no such idea presented itself to him, it was likely enough that if he perceived that his privacy was intruded on, he would turn back towards the villa, and regain his carriage.

Yet another minute, and they would all be in the midst of the scene, which even those of the party who had treated it with the most levity in anticipation, could not help feeling, now it was at

hand, to be a serious one. One minute! No! Yet another! Would that slow but firm and clearly-heard footfall, heavy but regular, never bring the old man to the end of the walk! The click of the shutting of Cesare's watch, which, in his nervousness, he had consulted to calculate how long might possibly be allowed for the Bishop's walk up the avenue, startled them all in the deadness of the silence, and called a warning gesture from Carlo's two closed fists shaken before his forward-bent face.

But now the footsteps are evidently near at hand! Now they cease, as the old Cardinal stops to address some observation to his attendant chaplain. Is he turning back? No! The steps come on again—they are close to the ears of the listeners. Now! Now for it!

Placidly and unsuspiciously the tall and venerable-looking old man stepped forward into the circular area under the ilex-trees, and in the next instant was aware of the presence of the four young people. It did not appear, however, as if any suspicion of their purpose had flashed upon him. He probably imagined that they were idle lads and lasses, whom the beauty of the afternoon

had tempted to anticipate the morrow's holiday. And, lifting his hand in the attitude of benediction, he was about to turn back into the avenue, when Cesare, holding Maddalena by the hand, suddenly stepped immediately in front of him.

The chaplain had been more ready, at the first glimpse of the intruders, to guess, or at least to suspect, the nature of their errand, and, seeing the possibility that his own testimony might contribute to the completion of a deed which the Church always does everything in her power to prevent, he had, with exceeding promptitude, retreated a sufficient number of paces to put him safely out of hearing of any words that might follow.

The venerable old Archbishop, however, was fairly caught. Throwing up his open hands above his head, with a gesture expressing at the same time surprise and reprobation, the old man drew one hasty step backwards, and there stood as if rooted to the ground.

But the short words had been spoken by Cesare and by Maddalena. The Bishop had heard them; and, according to the theory of the Catholic Church, the marriage was already beyond the power of man to undo.

"Audacious insolents!" exclaimed the outraged chaplain, who, when he saw, though he could not hear, what had passed, returned to the side of his superior.

"Children, children! what have you done?" cried the aged Cardinal, in whom the shock of the surprise and distress seemed to have overpowered for the moment the sense of indignation and the duty of reproof.

Cesare, who wished to hear no more, had endeavoured to drag Maddalena from the spot as soon as ever the fateful words had been spoken. But she, hardly conscious of what she was doing, but impelled by an unreasoned feeling of the need of a blessing on what she felt to be a sacred act, and by the venerable appearance of the dignified old man, had thrown herself, as he spoke, upon her knees at his feet.

"Nay, daughter!" he continued, speaking more calmly, and not without severity, though still more sorrowfully than angrily, "how can you ask a benediction from me on the deed you have done? Doubtless you know that the Church disapproves in the highest degree, and the civil law punishes, such acts as that of which you have been guilty."

"Your Eminence will, nevertheless, condescend, perhaps, to assure my wife that what has been done has made her such legally," said Cesare, who feared the effect of the Cardinal's words on Maddalena's mind.

"Children!" said the old man, severely, but yet not unkindly, "misguided and ill advised as your conduct has been, ye are assuredly man and wife in the sight of God, in the sight of the Holy Church, and of the Law. The Church, however reprovingly, has joined ye together, and no human authority can part you!"

Maddalena rose from her knees as he ceased speaking, and Cesare, twining one arm round her waist, and whispering some adjuration in her ear, succeeded in drawing her beyond the circuit of green wall which enclosed the spot where this scene had taken place, and towards the little door in the garden wall, almost before the Archbishop was aware of his intention to escape. Carlo Mancini had, immediately after the binding words were spoken, effected his retreat to the other side of the garden wall. It had been settled that he should avail himself of a place in Cesare's carriage as far as a neighbouring town on a great road,

where he could be picked up by a passing diligence, and carried out of the probable reach of any results likely to arise from the infraction of the civil law of which he had been guilty. He was already seated in the carriage, when Cesare half carried, half drew Maddalena through the little door, and lifted her in, following himself, and at the same moment bidding the driver lose no time in getting over the first stage of the journey, which was to take them out of the way of the hubbub likely to be caused, not only by the marriage, but by the discovery, which could not fail soon to follow, that it was no marriage at all.

Pietro Varani had steadily adhered to the determination he had expressed to Malatesta, when the proposal of acting as one of the witnesses of Maddalena's marriage was first made to him. He refused to leave Bologna, preferring, as he said, to avow openly what he had done, and to face the consequences of it.

When the others, therefore, had made their escape in the manner that has been told, Pietro remained alone in the presence of the Archbishop and his chaplain.

“Are you aware, young man, of the nature of

the transaction in which you have taken a part?" asked the latter, very sternly.

Pietro, whose painful nervousness seemed to have left him as soon as Maddalena had vanished from the scene, and was, as he believed, in safety, replied calmly and succinctly enough, though with his usual shy awkwardness, "A canonical, though clandestine, marriage."

"Exactly so, sir! A canonical, though clandestine, marriage," repeated the chaplain, apparently still further angered by the cool precision of the poor student's reply. "And since you are so accurately informed as to the qualification of the act of which you have been guilty," he continued, with increasing acerbity of manner, "you are doubtless also aware that the law punishes such acts, and is little likely to look with leniency on such an audacious and unparalleled a case as thus insolently entrapping his Eminence the Archbishop."

"I am aware!" said Pietro, hanging his head and crossing his hands at the wrists in front of him, as if they were fettered, in the attitude of one of the old statues of barbarian kings as they appeared in the triumph of their Roman conquerors.

"Very well, sir!" replied the exasperated chaplain. "I shall trouble you, therefore, for your name and address, if you please."

"Pietro Varani, very reverend sir, student in medicine in the University of Bologna."

"Are you a Bolognese, as I gather from your speech, or a native of any other part of Italy?"

"The son of a Bolognese mother, very reverend sir, and living with her in the Piazza of San Domenico."

"Very good, Pietro Varani, of the Piazza of San Domenico, student of medicine," repeated the priest, making a note in some tablets he had drawn from his pocket. "You will not fail, Signor Pietro Varani, to wait upon his Eminence the Archbishop's chancellor at the palace, at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I will not fail to do so," said Pietro, still standing in the attitude of a condemned criminal.

"And if we are able to discover any circumstances which may justify us in recommending you to the lenient consideration of the civil power, young man, it will be grateful to us to allow them their full weight," added the Archbishop, as he rapidly performed the ceremony of benediction

with his jewelled fingers, and turned to retrace his steps along the avenue.

Varani watched the retreating figures of the two priests for a while, as if he were rooted to the ground where he stood, and then recovering himself by an effort from his reverie, retreated by the little door in the wall by which he had entered, and slowly began his return to Bologna, feeling as if the only light in his world were gone out of it, and all was darkness and void.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE TWO WIDOWS.

IT was dark night before Pietro found himself at the city gate on his return from his expedition to the Contini Gardens. For pondering on many things, he had wandered away into the fields, paying no attention to the way he was going. Pondering many things; among which the probable consequences of his interview with the authorities of the archiepiscopal court had no place. It would have been more reasonable to have bestowed some consideration on the somewhat serious eventualities depending thereon. But Varani was a man who habitually practised the precept which exhorts men to take no thought for the morrow, in its most absolute and literal sense. His mind, moreover, was busy during those hours of objectless rambling, with other matters, which must be admitted to have

a less practical tendency. He pondered long, for instance, on the difference between himself and Cesare Malatesta. In making the comparison, it may fairly be said that he did see himself as others saw him. He appreciated the difference of the impression made by their respective appearances on the eyes and minds of man and womankind at its full value; a value not likely to be lightly estimated when viewed in connexion with the events of that afternoon. Nevertheless, in reply to the self-proposed question, whether he, Pietro Varani—poor, ugly, unloved—would like to be Cesare Malatesta—rich, handsome, and beloved—there came from his inmost consciousness an unvarying reply in the negative; to his own surprise. It seemed to him very unaccountable that it should be so. Would he like to have Malatesta's handsome face, expressive eyes, and elegant figure? Yes! very unquestionably. But to *be* he? Still the answer, out of some unsounded depths of his nature, came back ever the same—No! What, not to be the chosen, the beloved of Maddalena! It seemed to him like blasphemy to say still, No! to that. He wanted to say “Yes!” he would do anything for that. But despite himself there was the consciousness that he would not *be* Malatesta—beauty, wealth, rank and all—even to be loved by Maddalena. Would lie, for instance, even for that consideration, be the man who *had* purposed, who had even

conceived the passing thought of purposing to act towards her as Malatesta had proposed to act? But he had thought better of it! There was the true repentance—change of mind, of views, of intention, and of will. Malatesta was no longer the same individual in this respect; and was blessed by inestimable happiness as his reward. In this manner he argued the case against himself. But the persistent testimony from the inner consciousness *would* keep forcing itself upon him. He would not for any conceivable consideration be Malatesta. In vain he rated that obstinate testimony of the inner man! Why, coxcomb! Self-sufficient, overweening, absurd coxcomb! Has not Maddalena seen, and known, and judged between us? And you dare to fancy there can be an appeal against the sentence? Idiot! Dolt! Paragon of self-conceit! Learn to know yourself—know not only that woman's love is not for you to hope for in this world, but that you have no right to it; that it is fitting, just, and proper that you should be cut off from it; not only that it is beyond your reach, but that you do not deserve it. Is Maddalena unjust? Would she not have given it me if I had deserved it? And I dare to prefer to be my own wretched mis-formed, nature-disowned self, rather than he whom she loves! But inner consciousness won't argue; only persists; as is its way.

So Pietro, who in his aimless wandering had reached the very spot on the top of the hill of San Luca where he and Malatesta had had their conversation about the marriage, having climbed the eminence from the other side, sat himself down on the parapet wall, which commanded the view over all the plain of Lombardy, as has been said, and proceeded, unconscious of any fixed purpose to do so, to examine the matter in question.

Supposing, mused he, that it *were* really the case, that there is that hidden within this unshapely and unsightly carcase of mine, which is more worthy of Maddalena's love, which could contribute more to her happiness, than aught to be found beneath the love-attracting exterior of that happy man; supposing that there should be in him—(may God in mercy grant it be not so!)—that which must make her misery; and supposing that the outward presentment of each were stripped away, so that she saw only the moral nature within, how would her love go then? Ay, if this hateful covering were stripped off, featly, deftly, and completely, as one day it shall be! But if it were only *seen through*? Ay, what then? Why, Maddalena would break her gentle heart; but her love would go still, as it has gone; her love and the love of all others such. That is the eternal law of nature; a law, therefore, working to make broken hearts and misery unspeakable! Tragedies never ending; woe

crushing most fatally the noblest and tenderest natures, inevitable as long as the world shall last ! Is this the normal law ? No ! no ! for ever No ! Surely there is some error in the premises somewhere. No ! The God who made that lovely and bounteous world beneath my eye, did not plan it for inevitable tragedies. Never ! never ! That way atheism lies ! and some other exit must be found.

Whence comes the difficulty ? Does it not spring from the twofold nature of man ? And if those two natures were called on to defend their several requirements, how would the debate go ? Physical nature and moral nature has each to plead its cause. The first would say of such a marriage as that made to-day, "That is a match of my making, and one that I fully approve." "And an evil day's work have you done in making it," replies Moral Nature ; "you have laid the foundation for misery and wretchedness." "If so," says Physical Nature, "the misery will arise in your department. I attend to my own appointed business, and leave you to manage yours. It is my bounden duty to look to the amelioration, in strength, beauty, and all sorts of capability of the human race. And I strive aganst wind and tide to do so. An up-hill task it is to struggle against the results of all sorts of follies, and ignorances, and stupidities. But I do my best." "Ay !" rejoins Moral Nature,

sadly ; "and with broken hearts, woes unutterable, and sin for the frequent result!" "I cannot take note of all that," says the other ; "those are your affairs. I must be permitted to disregard what does not belong to my own department. And need I remind you, sister, that without my efforts at improvement in my domain, all hope of a desirable state of things in yours would grow less and less." "Are my claims, then, to be always overridden, and are the evils resulting from the neglect of them to be eternal ?" remonstrates the more lofty-natured but less practical sister. "By no means !" returns the other. "Remember that these pur-blind mortals are but in their kittenhood. They will see more clearly ere long. They will learn to comprehend my teaching, and to understand the nature and uses of the things and forces around them. They will cease to run blindly, despite all I can do to prevent them, into all sorts of troubles, indigestions, colds in the head, joint-racking rheumatisms, destructive excesses, still more destructive destitution, scrofulas and consumptions, and all the rest. And let me whisper to you, sister, that you can do yeoman's service in advancing this consummation ; and that would be a wiser mode of contributing to the good cause, than finding fault with me. Only work you as hard as I do, and have a little patience ; and the time shall come when there shall be no rivalry,

no discord, and no jarring of rival claims between us."

"And so," said Pietro to himself, as he rose from the parapet wall, and observed that the dotted lights of near and distant villages and farms were all that remained visible in the plain below him,— "and so, *Solvuntur singultu tabulae!*" not without a sigh of aspiration, however, towards "the glory that shall be." "So, shoulders to the wheel! and *en avant!*"

And Varani, with his brain full of these musings, found himself at length at the gate of the city, and did not need any great amount of presence of mind to find his way thence to the Piazza di San Domenico.

Having stumbled up the dark staircase, however, and reached the third floor, his first knock was at the door opposite to that of his own home. The first duty to be done was to give the widow Tacca his report of the completion of the marriage.

With how strangely different a feeling he now approached that door, from that which had never failed to set his heart beating in the days that were gone for ever! How inexpressibly dreary and sad did the little room, with the lonely widow sitting at her eternal knitting by the one wick of the Roman lamp, appear to him! Not sadder, doubtless, than it seemed and was felt to be by the widow, now widowed anew! The light was gone out of it for

both of them—it was gone out of the widow's life ; and though Varani would have vigorously refused to admit to himself that such was the case, the truth was, that it was gone out for him too.

The widow Tacca had made her daughter's life burdensome to her by the exactions of her petty selfishness ; yet she dearly and truly loved her child. There was something genuinely pathetic, too, in the position of the poor little woman, lonely there in her dreary room and her solitary home. But her expressions of the sorrow which had fallen upon her did not exhibit it on its poetical side.

" Nobody but me to go to the door now !" she grumbled, as she admitted Varani. " Come in, and shut the door after you, if you are going to ! And don't stand staring in that way. You did not expect to find her here, I suppose, did you ? "

" No, Signora Tacca, no ! I did not expect to find her here," replied Varani, dreamily ; " I only called to tell you that it all went off well ! "

" Went off well !—well, indeed ! How I am to draw a bucket of water up from the yard with my rheumatism, I don't know ! That's what I look to."

" I will draw up the bucket for you whenever you will ask me, Signora Tacca," said Varani, simply.

" Ay ! a very likely story ! And you'll come and sit opposite me there, that my eyes may have

the pleasure of resting on you, I should not wonder; and you will fill the house with your blithe singing, that my ears may be gladdened by her voice, won't you?"

"No one can ever supply her place, Signora, I well know, let alone me. But I thought you wished for the marriage?"

"Well! could I stand in my girl's light so as not to wish it? It is a great thing—a very great thing—a wonderful favour of the Holy Virgin! But it is a cruel loss for me! Did the Archbishop say anything?"

"He was angry, and threatened. But he said that they were married before God and before the Church, and that no man could any more put them asunder!"

"To think of my Maddalena being married by the Archbishop! But what did he threaten?"

"He said that all those present there before him were punishable by the law. It was chiefly his chaplain who spoke. He made me give him my name. I am to go to him to-morrow morning."

"Holy Virgin! what will happen to you! However, they cannot undo the marriage! And what did he say to the others?"

"The other witness gave him no time to say anything. He went off in a hurry as soon as ever the words were spoken by Maddalena and—her husband. She went down on her knees before

the Archbishop, but Malatesta got her away as quickly as he could."

"And what will they do to you?"

"Oh! nothing very terrible. They may imprison me for some months, I believe."

"But if you were to lay it all on the Marchese? They'd never send a Marchese to prison, I'm sure. And if they knew that you did it to please him, you would be let off, you may depend upon it!"

"But I did not do it to please him. And now I must go and tell my mother about it. Good night, Signora Tacca!"

Varani had spoken throughout this short dialogue in a more than calm—in a depressed and almost dreamy sort of way, which contrasted strangely with the sharp, querulous, ungenial manner of the little old woman.

"What a queer half-saved creature it is!" muttered La Signora Tacca to herself, as she hobbled back to her seat in her solitary room, after shutting and bolting the door behind him; "I never could tell what Maddalena could see to like so much in him, for my part; but I am glad he was witness to the wedding, too!"

Pietro stepped across the landing-place, and was admitted at the opposite door by a very different sort of old woman from the one he had just quitted. She was not by several years so old, in the first place; indeed, hardly to be called an old woman,

were it not that her grey hair, the deeply-marked lines in her face, and the style of her dress, seemed to justify the phrase. At all events, a remarkable-looking woman. Of more than ordinary height, and very far more than ordinary grace and dignity of bearing and gesture, her figure had a majesty about it that might have fitted her to sit as a model for a Semiramis. The features of the face, too, were noble, and must once have been very handsome; but they could hardly be said to be pleasing. There was too much hardness, too much haughtiness in the cut, and still more in the expression of them. The eye still retained all its fire, and the expression of it was intensified by the thick, straight, black eyebrow, which must always have been too strongly marked for beauty. The large and well-formed mouth, still retaining its complete garniture of regular, well-preserved teeth, was unquestionably handsome, but was certainly not pleasing to those capable of appreciating the presence or absence from a face of any beyond merely material beauty. It was a sarcastic and intensely proud mouth. The powerful and strongly-developed chin told of firmness and great power of will. There was nothing ignoble, nothing mean, low, or small, to be found in any line of the features, or in any phase of the expressions that passed over them; but it was not a face to conciliate affection, or to hold out promise of sym-

pathy. La Signora Tacca had that egoism of the heart which produces its crop in practical selfishness, without inspiring any specially overweening estimate of self. The widow Varani had that other egoism, of the head, which does not descend to the selfishness that occupies itself about the well-being of the corporeal self, but venerates the more spiritual defects of pride, imperiousness, and immoderate self-esteem.

Signora Varani's feelings towards her son were of a strangely mixed kind. They were compounded of love, contempt, compassion, and respect. He had ever been a good son; she was not an unnatural mother, and in truth she loved him, though it would not be in accordance with her nature to say tenderly. Yet a feeling that honestly could be called by no other name save that of contempt, was generated in her mind by the unpractical cast of her son's character, by the vagueness of his mind, and his little taste or adaptation for the active business of life. These same qualities, so markedly in contrast with the leading peculiarities of her own character, added to a very sufficiently acute perception of her son's unfortunate deficiency in all that commends itself to the outward eye, blended her feelings with a vein of compassion that often softened the results of the radical difference in the two characters. And there existed, too, at the bottom of the mo-

ther's heart a fund of respect for her son's character, which seems somewhat incompatible with the other feelings which have been described. It was produced by an almost instinctive appreciation of the force of will, which was the principal, indeed almost the only, quality which the two idiosyncrasies had in common. Though inheriting little else of his mother's Juno-like features, the strong chin was there; and it was not there for nothing. Beyond the unmistakable perseverance with which he had laboured in the pursuit of his favourite studies, no very marked opportunity had, as yet, occurred in the life of Pietro Varani for the display of that perhaps most valuable of all human qualities, the strength of volition, which degenerates, it is true, when joined to a dwarfed moral stature, into obstinacy, but which, when united to a large nature, is the indispensable base of all greatness and great deeds. There had been small possibilities of greatness of any kind in the life of the poor student during the twenty years of it which had passed. But the nature of the mother, sympathetic in this respect, if in no other, with that of her son, had enabled her to feel the presence of the latent quality in his character. And it compelled from her a feeling of respect, which tempered and struggled with the less favourable sentiments inspired in her by those of his qualities which differed so materially from her own.

Marta Varani was not only a remarkable woman in herself; she held a remarkable position, and played a remarkable part, in the world in which she lived. And it will be as well to let it be clearly understood at once what this position and this part were—especially as it may be done in a few words.

From 1814 up to the recent successful rejection of the Papal government by the largest part of the Pope's dominions, the various provinces composing them existed in a chronic state of more or less active disaffection, resistance, and rebellion. More especially was this the case in those provinces which are situated on the eastern side of the Apennine range of mountains. Of course Europe generally, and the statesmen of Europe in particular, were aware of this fact; but they were very far from being aware of the degree to which this fact existed. Europe thought, and the statesmen thought, that it was on the cards that things might continue as they were, and that what had gone on so long, might go on for an indefinite time longer. But Europe and the statesmen would not have thought so if they had known all that Marta Varani knew. There were great outbreaks, trampled out in blood by priests and soldiers from time to time, which all the world heard of. But these were only the great periodical eruptions of the volcano. The subterranean fires were never at rest. Resistance

to the government, and movements having in view its eventual overthrow, were unceasing. The secret documents which fell into the hands of the provisional government at the time of the final expulsion of the Pontifical authorities, and which have been in great part published, show that the state of the country was as above characterised, to a degree surprising even to those who were perfectly aware, in a general way, of the unpopularity of the Papal government. The record of the unceasing protest against the government of every part of the population that was not government—of the ever vigilant, ever suspicious repression which was needed to keep the ruling powers in their places from day to day, and of the ubiquitous and perpetual struggle between secret treason and secret police, may now be read at large by any who will take the trouble to do so.\* Conspiracies of all sorts, among all classes, with views and objects more or less extensive, were incessant. And it is scarcely too much to say that Marta Varani was, in greater or less degree, cognisant of all of them.

Her obscure and modest home, in a remote and quiet quarter, was a regular house of call for conspirators, proscribed, liberals, and all at enmity with the government. Her landlord, though ostensibly

\* "Il Governo Pontificio e lo stato Romano. Documenti raccolti per decreto del Governo delle Romagne. Dal Cav. Achille Gennarelli." Prato, 1860. 2 vols. imp. 8vo.

a well-affected subject, and holding himself aloof from all political disturbances, was, like so many others, secretly the friend and ally of the liberal party, and well aware of the character and habits of his tenant. Signora Varani herself was the trusted agent and medium of communication between all the most actively disaffected spirits in the country. She might be said to have kept a general agency in the treason line, and to have carried on a large business as a sedition broker. Not that by such phrases it is to be understood that her services to the cause were paid services. Such was by no means the case. Her motives of action were genuine devotion to the liberal cause, and bitter hatred of the priestly government. No doubt, if any specially hard pressure for rent, or any such matter, had fallen upon her, aid would very readily have been forthcoming. Marta Varani was a far too useful and important person to the party to be suffered to go to the wall, or to be missed from her well-known post on the third floor of the old house in the Piazza di San Domenico.

She was, in truth, a devoted partisan, whose loss it would have been difficult to replace. By natural and acquired qualities and character, she was admirably adapted for the post she filled. Trusty, faithful, prudent to the completest degree, she was invaluable to her friends, whether engaged in hatching plots against the authorities, or in escap-

ing from their vengeance. If a man were needed capable of holding an interview with a cardinal with a fair chance of deceiving him, or if the business in hand required only the baffling of the vigilance of a turnkey; if services were required which risked the life of him who should undertake them, or if they demanded a sure hand, which had no scruple to take another's life for the good cause, Marta Varani knew how and where to put her hand on the individual suited to the purpose: If a secure hiding-place in any one of the cities of Romagna were wanted, Marta could indicate the unsuspected roof, palace or hovel, where it might be with safety found. If the means of communication with outlaws hiding among the fastnesses of the hills were sought for, Marta Varani could always find a messenger who could be trusted, at a moment's notice.

It is not to be supposed that a life occupied in such a manner, could be passed in Bologna without having in some degree attracted the attention of the police. It had done so sufficiently to make Marta Varani a suspected person, and to acquire for her and her house a prominent place in the black-books of the political authorities. But the caution which she had never once forgotten, and the trustworthiness of all those who could have proved anything against her, had as yet baffled the police, and prevented any information respecting her from reach-

ing the ears of the government, beyond the fact that she was a woman of marked liberal tendencies and associations, a bad subject, and a bad church-woman.

It may further be remarked, that a life passed in breaking and rebelling against the laws, is not likely to be a wholesome and favourable one for the moral character, in however good or righteous a cause the laws may be set at defiance. It is one of the most disastrous effects of bad laws, that they thus demoralise the people subjected to them, by teaching and tempting them to be lawless.

“Demoralise” is not too strong a word to use in speaking philosophically of the tendency of such legislation. But it would be far too strong a phrase to say, speaking in the colloquial sense of the words, that Marta Varani was a demoralised woman. She had many high and valuable moral qualities. But she had long been accustomed to consider “the world and the world’s law” as not her friend. To deceive and mislead the administrators of that law, to set its provisions at defiance, to measure the permissibility of all acts with reference to their tendency to advance a cause which was under the ban of the law, had been her mental habit and active practice for years. And it will be understood that such a training is but too well calculated to obliterate in a perilous manner the boundary lines, often somewhat obscure, between the prohi-

bitions of the law and those of strict morality,—between the “mala prohibita,” and the “mala per se.”

The character of Marta Varani had suffered less, perhaps, from the influences of such a life, than would have been the case with most persons. For her intellect was naturally a strong and clear one, and her passions and prejudices, enlisted as they were on the side of right, were under the control of it. And on the whole it may be asserted that, take her all in all, Marta Varani was not an altogether bad or unestimable woman.

She did not, however, receive her son graciously, when she opened the door to the knock, performed by the toe of his boot against the panel.

“ So ! thy day’s work is done, my son, is it ? ” she said, bitterly. “ It was kind of his lordship to dismiss thee in time to get thy supper. Did he vouchsafe to fling thee a *buonamano*\* for thy services ? ”

“ You know, my mother,” replied Pietro, impassively, “ that my motives in forwarding the business that has been done this day were not even to oblige the Marchese Malatesta, much less to be recompensed by him.”

“ What call hadst thou to mix thyself in any wise with the affairs of such as he ? Between thee

\* Money to drink.

and the Marchese Malatesta there can be no intercourse that is not disgraceful to at least one of the parties. Thinkest thou that thou hast rendered good service to the silly girl who has been caught by his lure ? ”

“ That, at least, was my sole purpose, mother. Maddalena loved him ; and—therefore it was best that she should be married to him.”

“ Love him ! I tell thee, Pietro, that no tie between such as he and such as yon girl, can have aught of holy or good in it. And the tighter thou hast tied her to him, the worse deed hast thou done by her. But, is this queer marriage, made by catching a bishop in a garden like a bird in a springe, held a valid one by the wiseacres of the law ? ”

“ It is so, mother. I ascertained that fact. The Church considers a marriage so made to be valid and irrevocable, though it holds the making of such an one to be a sin in all the parties concerned, and the law punishes it.”

“ It makes my gorge rise to hear such stuff ! But it is of a piece with all the rest ! If it be wrong, why does the priest sanction it, and count it irrevocable ? If it be amiss, as I can well believe, to let two fools of children bind themselves to each other for life out of hand in that way, why hold out to them the temptation of making such a match ? ”

“It arises from their theory of the nature of the sacrament, mother !”

“Their theory of a fiddlestick’s end ! It arises from the whole of their theory and practice being based on a lie and a deception ! So thou art to be punished for the Archbishop’s doing, art thou ?”

“It seems so, mother !”

“All in consequence of their theory of the sacrament, no doubt ! And what of the others ?”

“They would all be liable to punishment ; but they escaped.”

“And left thee to suffer for them, thou poor cheated gaby !”

“Nay, mother ! Malatesta, to do him justice, offered me the means of escaping also. It was my own will to remain and abide the consequences of what I chose to do. It is but little they can do to me. What are a few weeks’ imprisonment ? And even that is mostly changed, they tell me, for reclusion in a convent of friars.”

“A change for the worse, my son ! The prison is the honester place, and the company there ten to one more agreeable and more respectable ! Stick to the prison, I say !”

“I think you are right, mother ! But I suppose I shall be allowed no choice in the matter. I shall know all about it to-morrow morning ; for I am to go to the Archbishop’s Chancery at ten to-morrow morning.”

"Ugh! I loathe the sound of their jargon! What should bishops have to do with chanceries? There! sit down, boy, and keep the cradle rocking a bit, while I get thee some supper. The child has waked up!"

Pietro sat down to the task assigned to him, with every appearance of feeling it to be a labour of love. Putting one huge foot on the rocker with much precaution against the obvious peril of upsetting the tiny machine, he peered into it with a loving smile, that wreathed his features into a convulsion well fitted to frighten the little inmate into fits. It was as gracious and charming an infant's head as ever inspired Leonardo or Raphael, that his gaze rested on, nestling amid the pillows, while one large round blue eye—its fellow being hidden by the bed-clothes—either instinctively reading love in the uncouth features hanging over it, or already reconciled to them by familiarity, laughed back at him; and presently two fat pink little hands, looking as if they were carved out of the rosiest part of the lip of a conch-shell, struggled forth from under the coverlet and stretched themselves out towards him, as an invitation to him to take the owner of them into his arms.

This was a challenge that it was not in Pietro's heart to decline, though the complying with it risked a reprimand from his mother. Of all home pleasures the most prized by him was an opportu-

nity of nursing the little Francesca—the only creature that seemed ready to accept and return as much love as ever he chose to lavish on her. When his mother came back from the adjoining kitchen with his supper, she had not the heart to be angry with the sight that her eyes rested on ; or to return to the subject of the coming troubles of the morrow, which Pietro had as entirely dismissed from his mind as if no such things as marriages, and archbishops, and chanceries, had ever existed in the world.

## CHAPTER VII.

## BEFORE HIS EMINENCE THE ARCHIBISHOP.

PUNCTUALLY at nine o'clock on the following morning, Pietro Varani presented himself at the *Cancelleria* of the archiepiscopal residence, and was received there by one of those peculiar hybrid officials, half lay, half clerical, who have been generated by the baneful and unnatural union of the spiritual and temporal authorities. The whole race of them which swarmed in such loathsome abundance over every square mile of the country cursed by priestly rule, under a wonderful variety of strange titles, intelligible to no man, save by dint of patient study of *Ducange* and the procedure of canon law, was marked by an unmistakable brand peculiar to it. Some of the creatures were, as far as human ordinances fallen to utter effeteness and imbecility could make them such,

priests—nay, prelates ! Shade of George Herbert ! such priests to the Temple ! Priests, whose capabilities, functions, views of human life and knowledge, were closely akin to those of a St. Mary-Axe attorney ! In others, an additional shade of the lay element in the theory of their functions kept them in perpetual limbo on the farther shore of the ecclesiastical Styx, as deacons ! Others again were, in some incomprehensible way, “ecclesiastical persons,” though laying no claim to *Holy Orders*. While a fourth class, reluctantly suffered to remain in the outer court of the Gentiles, as veritable laymen, were permitted, as the price of their bodies and souls, to fatten the former and starve the latter on the crumbs that fell from the ecclesiastical table, on the understanding that both were to be ineffaceably branded with the unmistakable broad arrow that marked them as the Church’s own. From the prelate who, in the character of state prosecutor, strained the law against a suspected liberal, to the police official who, unable to read the traveller’s passport, pored over the leaves of it to see if he could find the blurred stamp with the cross keys, which testified that Peter had squeezed his pence out of the heretic, Mother Church claimed and marked them all as her own. The soul-marks which characterise the tribe are very well known to those who have had the misfortune of seeing much of them. The more imme-

diate recognisable marks which Mother Church places on the bodies of her adepts—especially of such of them as sit below the salt at her board in their quality of laymen—may be described as they appeared in that specimen of the race which Pietro found in attendance at the Archbishop's Chancery.

He was, of course, untonsured; but strove to dissemble the defect as far as might be by wearing a close-fitting black skull-cap, such as priests are wont to use for covering their heads in cold churches. He could not wear the peculiar neck-gear which marks the Roman Levite, but he came as near to the appearance of it as he could, by the aid of a wisp of yellow-white muslin swathed tightly round the throat. Black camlet breeches, greased and rubbed to a shiny polish, small silver knee-buckles, and very coarse and rusty black-worsted stockings, are permissible to layman and clerk alike, and are the favourite habiliments of the hybrids between the two. The shoes were intensely ecclesiastical. Whether any physiological reason can be found for the fact, or whether any secret code of instructions exist in Pope-land which is imperative on this head, certain it is that all the rank and file of the army of Mother Church, whether clerical, semi-clerical, or lay, affect a speciality in this article of costume of a singular kind. A low-cut shoe, nearly as broad as it is long, and equally broad in all its parts, is so

constant a peculiarity of ecclesiastical attire, that “ex pede Sacristan” may be said with quite as much reason as “ex pede Herculem” ever was. It may also be remarked that this variety of the human species is very frequently plantigrade. The coat has its distinctive character too, though I fear I am not tailor enough to describe the peculiarity of its cut. It is always what is called a tail-coat; but, in contradiction to what seems the natural character of that absurdest of all invented garments, the tendency of the lay-clerical coat is to run to breadth rather than length. It is, of course, black, rusty, and greasy. The waistcoat’s chief characteristic is a state of extreme snuff-begrimedness. To all this may be added that the hair is cut so as to hang like a short square-shaped vallance over the forehead, making it appear mean and low, even if by any unaccountable freak of Nature the man have received it otherwise from her hand.

Such was the individual who received Varani with a malignant scowl when he presented himself at the Chancery;—with a malignant scowl of course, for such is the natural and habitual expression of the features of men who live among people by whom they are conscious of being feared, hated, and despised. The man motioned him, without speaking, to sit down on a bench placed against the whitewashed wall; and, when he had kept him there, ostentatiously doing nothing him-

self the while, a sufficient time to show the absolute insignificance of a mere outer-court Gentile of the people in the presence of even the humblest member of the dominant caste, he left the office to announce his coming to his superiors. Thereupon, instead of being taken into the usual business office-room, he was conducted by a back stair into a room on the first floor, in which he found the Archbishop himself, attended by the same chaplain who had been with him in the Contini Gardens on the previous day. His conductor, having first made lowly obeisance to the prelate, silently handed a folded paper to the chaplain, and then bestowing a parting scowl on the delinquent, left the room, and closed the door behind him.

"Pietro Varani," said the chaplain, a swarthy, gaunt, hard-featured man, with a grating voice, looking at his notes as he spoke, "his Eminence has chosen to examine himself the sad matter which has brought you here, as there are circumstances connected with it that give the case a peculiar and disastrous importance. I have to warn you that the sole chance of any mitigation of the utmost rigour of the law being permitted in your case, will depend on your speaking the entire and exact truth in reply to all the questions that may be put to you."

After some violent preparatory efforts, which caused Varani's features to work like those of a

man endeavouring to convey his meaning to one entirely deaf by the shaping of the words with his lips, he jerked out, in answer to the chaplain's warning :

"I—I always do that, very reverend sir, whatever chance may come of it."

"I hope so, young man !" said the aged Cardinal, gravely. "Do so now, and you will be dealt with as leniently as the interests of society will permit. The Church is ever merciful to those who confess, and are sorry for their wrong-doing."

"But I don't know that I have done anything wrong, your reverence—Eminence, I mean !" stammered Pietro, becoming as he spoke very red in the face, and resting himself first on one foot and then on the other, as if he found the floor too hot to stand on.

"How, sir ! not know you have done wrong ?" broke in the chaplain ; "not know that you have done wrong in aiding and abetting a clandestine marriage, and in audaciously surprising his Eminence the Archbishop himself for the purpose of accomplishing it !"

"I did it because I wished to do right, your reverence—Eminence, I mean," said Pietro, resolutely, addressing himself to the Archbishop, instead of the chaplain, who had addressed him.

"We shall endeavour to find the means of im-

proving your judgment for the future, Signor Pietro Varani!" said the chaplain.

But the Cardinal added, more mildly, "If you really had any motives for acting as you did, which appeared to your ignorance to be good ones, let me hear you explain them."

"As far as I see, your Eminence," said Pietro, twisting his features into dreadful contortions as he spoke, "I did just as Holy Church does, and from the same motives!"

"Take care, young man; take care what you are about! This is not a place nor a presence for ribaldry," thundered the chaplain.

But again the Archbishop said, more mildly, though very gravely: "Speak not lightly, young man, of what it is to be presumed you know nothing of. But if you have any serious and not irreverent meaning, explain yourself."

"I read in the canons, your Eminence, that the Church detests such marriages as I witnessed yesterday. And certainly, I detested that marriage as much as Holy Church could do. But the Church, nevertheless, makes the marriage and holds it good, lest worse might come to pass, if it did otherwise. I acted from exactly the same motive."

"You speak far too presumptuously, young man, of the views and motives of Holy Church, which, trust me, are beyond the gauging of your intellect.

But it may be that your motives, though erring, were not wholly without good intention. Explain them to me further."

Thus exhorted, the poor student essayed his best to take a correct general view of the considerations that had moved him, and to give a lucid account of them. But his efforts produced only a series of jerking movements of his shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees, as if all those joints were suddenly racked by rheumatism, together with a thrice-repeated, futile attempt to force some utterance from his huge, gaspingly-opened mouth.

"Come, young man ! No prevarication here ! Speak the truth ! That may always be easily done !" thundered the chaplain.

"It is not always easy ! I never prevaricate, your reverence !" jerked out Pietro, able at least to answer this.

"Take your time, young man ; and reply then to my question," said the Archbishop, more mildly, but still very gravely, while the chaplain glared at him malignantly ; "what were the motives that induced you to become a witness to this clandestine marriage ?"

Thus encouraged, Pietro was at length able to say in a series of disjointed utterances, while the perspiration broke out thickly over his knotted forehead, "I knew he loved her—I knew she loved him—I knew he wanted to take her from

her home without marriage—I feared her weakness—I sought to protect her—That was my motive.”

“And were you aware that by taking this method of protecting her, you made yourself liable to severe punishment, and incurred, besides, the guilt of a heavy sin?” said the Cardinal.

“I was aware that I should be punished, your rev——Eminence!” replied Pietro, nodding his head three or four times, as if to say that there was no doubt at all about *that* part of the matter.

“A very clever bit of protection, indeed! Signor Varani,” sneered the chaplain. “You take an obscure, worthless girl”—(here Pietro performed a contortion that might have rivalled the attempts of Frankenstein’s creation)—“with whom and with whose family you and yours have been intimate and close neighbours for years—(we have all information about you here, sir, and it is by no means favourable)—interposed the chaplain, tapping with his knuckle the paper which the official had handed him—“and you contrive to marry her to a young man under age, heir to one of the largest fortunes and noblest names in his Holiness’s dominions. A very well-imagined stroke of protection, assuredly!”

“Your reverence’s informations are false and good for nothing!” exclaimed Pietro, whose indignation found him words readily enough this time.

"Audacious insolent! Do you know in whose presence you stand?" cried the outraged chaplain.

"In God's presence, I say that Maddalena Tacca is not a worthless girl, but as good and pure a girl as any His eye looks down on!" said Pietro, lifting his right hand as he spoke with energy and emphasis that might have become a practised orator.

A rapid glance was interchanged between the Cardinal and his chaplain; and the latter replied:

"Speak reverently, young man! and endeavour to comprehend, if you are capable of doing so, the sense of what is said to you. The conduct of the girl is nothing to the point. She is worthless as the wife of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta. You speak of protecting her. Who is to protect two noble families, on every member of which this disastrous marriage will bring down shame and sorrow?"

"It was the duty of the Marchese Cesare to think of that, your reverence; it was my duty to think of the less protected girl," rejoined Pietro, firmly.

"*Your* duty! And who and what made it your duty, I should like to know?" retorted the chaplain.

And then followed a short colloquy in an under tone between the Cardinal and his chaplain; of which the words "Malatesta"—"nephew"—"Sa-

cred College"—“Sampieri of Fermo”—were all that reached the ears of Varani.

“It is a very sad business !” said the Cardinal ; “a very disastrous affair ; and all those concerned in it have sinned grievously, and rendered themselves, besides, guilty in the eyes of the civil power. I am disposed to believe, Pietro Varani, that you have not been among the most culpable. I am willing to hope that your motive was not a bad one ; but it might have been attained blamelessly, and, indeed, meritoriously, by simply informing the proper authorities of the danger you feared, and of the criminal proceedings which were in contemplation. Had you done this, all would have been well. The paternal vigilance of the government would have known how to protect and direct aright all the parties concerned. As it is, not only has a great and heavy sin against religion, and a crime against the civil law been committed, but a very sad calamity has been caused and rendered irreparable ! It is sad, indeed, to think,” continued the old man, who was himself of noble blood and ancient race, and whose sympathies naturally ran on that side of the case—“sad to think of all the fair hopes yesterday’s bad deed will blast, and all the heavy hearts it will cause. In God’s mercy only can we trust, that it leads not to other sins and new calamities ! Let the needful information be taken,” he added, turning to the

chaplain, "for the due registry of this unhappy marriage."

"The name of the young man who escaped, and who acted as the other witness?" demanded the chaplain of Varani.

"Carlo Mancini, a student in the University, your reverence."

"Carlo Mancini," repeated the chaplain, making a note of it; "it will be easy to get the requisite particulars concerning him. Your own name and address?"

"Pietro Varani, student in medicine in this University, residing in the Piazza di San Domenico."

"Native of Bologna?"

"No, your reverence; native of Toulon, in France."

"Native of Toulon?" said the chaplain, referring for a moment to the paper he had before spoken of as containing no favourable information respecting poor Pietro—the unfavourable circumstances having reference, doubtless, to the reputation for disaffection to the government which attached to his mother.

"Age?" continued the chaplain.

"Twenty years last September, your reverence."

"What do you say?" cried the chaplain, almost shouting.

"I was twenty years of age last September, your reverence," repeated Varani, quietly.

The chaplain flung down his pen, and jumping up from his seat, cried, "Your Eminence hears that! the witness is under age! He can give no valid testimony! Only one witness able to testify was present! The marriage is null and void; and no harm has been done!" And he rubbed his hands with triumphant gratification as he spoke.

It was now Varani's turn to feel all the misery of the circumstances he had helped to create; and the horror of them rendered him quite insensible to the specialities of the place in which he was, and of the persons in whose presence he was speaking.

"What! What!" he exclaimed, turning ghastly pale, and throwing up his arms to their full extent above his head, "what do you say? Not married! not legally married!"

"Assuredly they are not. No! your shot has missed its aim this time, Signor Pietro Varani! and, Heaven be praised, there has been no harm done!"

"No harm done!" shrieked Varani; "no harm done! Man, man! is the destruction of that hapless deluded girl no harm done?"

"You are strangely forgetting yourself and the position in which you stand, young man," said the chaplain; "but I can make allowance for the disappointment of finding that the trap laid for another has, on the contrary, ensnared the lady who had the advantage of your 'protection.' The

next time you presume to read the canon law, you would do well to read it to somewhat better purpose."

"Fool! fool! stupid ignorant dolt that I have been!" exclaimed the miserable Pietro, in an agony of self-reproach and despair.

"It would seem so, truly!" said the chaplain, malignantly, rubbing his hands the while with irrepressible gratification.

"Young man," said the Cardinal, over whose face a shade of displeasure had passed while his chaplain had been speaking, "though I am bound to rejoice that the sin which you and your accomplices intended to commit yesterday was not, in fact, committed; and though there can be no doubt that the marriage it was sought to make would have been for very many reasons a most disastrous one; nevertheless I can sympathise with your manifest distress, and believe it to proceed from an honest feeling. I pray that the event may be a lesson to you for life, teaching you that no good can come from sin against the ordinances of the Holy Church. Now, at least, you must recognise the truth of my words, when I remarked to you a few minutes ago, that the proper way to have averted any danger of the kind you feared from the young girl who came before me yesterday, would have been to place her under the protection of his Holiness's paternal government."

"Of course, your Eminence, there is nothing more to be done in the matter of the registry?" said the chaplain.

"It is very clear," replied the Archbishop, "that there has been no valid marriage, and, therefore, there can of course be nothing to register. But it is not equally clear that the misfortunes which would arise from a valid solemnisation of the marriage in question, are yet finally avoided. This ill-advised young man having, by reason of this unintentional error, done a grievous wrong to the woman he purposed to make his wife, may yet repair that wrong."

"Your Eminence will kindly pardon me if I venture to point out that the books are very clear and precise on this point," said the chaplain, with the brisk sharpness of an Old Bailey lawyer who has all the criminal law at his fingers' ends, and can refer to his act, chapter, and section with the promptitude of the snap of a spring trap. "Your Eminence will remember that the best authorities concur in holding that no reparation is due from the seducer who shall have accomplished his object by means of a false promise of marriage, in cases where the man is much richer or higher in rank than the woman so injured, or where disgrace would ensue to the family of the man from a marriage with his victim.\* Your Eminence is

\* "Qui vero virginem seduxit per fictam matrimonii promis-

aware that in such cases Holy Church holds that no reparation is due. And it is too clear in the case in question, both that the status of the Marchese is infinitely superior to that of this nameless girl, and that indelible disgrace would fall on his family from a marriage with her."

Varani, who had listened to this exposition of the doctrines of the Church on the subject in view with unspeakable astonishment, and who looked, when the chaplain ceased speaking, as if he really doubted whether his ears were not deceiving him, stood staring at him for some moments, absolutely speechless from the violence of the various emotions which were struggling in him for expression.

"Is that the teaching of the Church ?" he said at last, in an under tone of absolute horror. " *Is it?* "

"It is so, my son !" said the Cardinal ; "but it is necessary to——"

But the boiling indignation of Varani could be contained no longer by any effort it was in his power to make.

"Then," cried he, gesticulating violently, and pouring forth the passionate abhorrence that mas-

sionem, ad quid tenetur? Generatim loquendo tenetur virginem defloratam matrimonio sibi copulare, nisi . . . vir sit longe nobilior aut ditione . . . si ex tali matrimonio dedecus obveniret familiæ viri."—Memoriale dei Confessori. Firenze, 1853, p. 193.

tered him, heedless of all consequences—"then I deny and renounce the Church! I renounce my baptism! I renounce all Christianity and all Christian doctrine. I will believe in some other God than yours, and find some more righteous interpretation of His will."

"Silence! mad boy, silence! and load not your soul with blasphemies!" cried the Cardinal. "Presumptuous and ignorant as you are, learn to believe that in whatever matter it may seem to your short-sighted foolishness that the teaching of the Church is other than you would have supposed it, it is your halting capacity, and not her Heaven-guided wisdom, which is at fault. I pardon the rash sin of your insensate words in consideration of the misfortune which has fallen upon you. I trust that you will heartily repent of having uttered them. With regard to the words I used respecting the possibilities of a future valid marriage between the parties in question, it is to be understood that I spoke not of what the Church would require him to do, not even perhaps of what it would be justifiable in him to do, but of what it might probably be his wish to do."

"Your Eminence will remember," observed the chaplain, "that this misguided young man has acted in this matter wholly without the knowledge of his father, who will assuredly be no less astonished than indignant when he hears of it. And he

will, no doubt, take efficient means to prevent the repetition of such a scandal. It is hardly to be supposed that either his son's attempt to make a clandestine marriage yesterday, or the result of our investigation to-day, which shows that happily the attempt was futile, will fail very shortly to reach the ears of the Marchese Salvadore Malatesta at Fermo. But in any case it will very evidently be our duty to afford the Marchese full information of all the circumstances, as well as to bring them to the knowledge of the young man's uncle, the Cardinal. Of course no regular marriage can be made, even should the young Marchese be sufficiently infatuated to attempt it, in spite of his father's opposition and prohibition. There would remain no danger save that of a repetition of the attempt of yesterday. And it will be a matter for consideration in the proper quarters whether it may not be desirable to obviate any such danger, and secure the peace of mind of two worthy families by a seclusion of the——female in question, for such a time as shall allow her opportunity for repenting of her disgraceful conduct. With the permission of your Eminence, I will make it my duty to communicate with the Marchese Salvadore, and with the Cardinal. As for this deluded young man——”

“With respect to this young man,” interrupted the Cardinal, rising, with a deep sigh, from his chair as he spoke, “I hope that the result of this day’s

inquiry may teach him more effectually than my words might have the power to do, that any good and righteous object may be served by acting in accordance with the precepts of the Church and the orders of the civil government, but that only disaster and trouble can come of any attempt to act in opposition to them. It is my belief that his object in this unhappy business was not a blamable one. It is my sincere trust that reflection will lead him to repent deeply of the inconsiderate expressions which have been wrung from him in this room by the bitterness of his disappointment. I enjoin him to make those rash words the subject of special confession to his director. Should the civil authorities, in the exercise of their paternal vigilance, deem it their duty to hold him responsible for the share he took in yesterday's affair, I have nothing to say to it. But, under all the circumstances of the case, and seeing that no result has in fact followed from the deception practised upon me, I shall not consider it my duty to make any communication on the subject to them."

Making the sign of benediction as he finished speaking, the Cardinal Archbishop left the room by a door opposite to the one by which Varani had entered it.

"Thanks to the more than paternal indulgence of his Eminence, you may go, Pietro Varani," snarled the chaplain, enunciating the name slowly

and carefully, as if inviting attention to the fact that he was impressing it on his memory. "You may go," he continued, "and communicate to the mother of the girl Tacca the result of your 'protection' of her daughter, and of the attempt to entrap into a marriage the heir of one of the wealthiest noblemen in the country. You may mention, also, that due care will be taken to save the girl from further descent on the path of profligacy. It remains to be seen whether the leniency of his Eminence to yourself be not so far misplaced as to lead you before long into bringing yourself"—tapping once again the paper that had been before alluded to as he spoke—"into yet more unpleasant collision with the authorities of the government. You may go."

And poor Pietro went. There was too crushing a weight of anguish at his heart for it to be possible to him to attempt any word of reply to the insults and injustice of the chaplain, whom he considered, indeed, to be acting only according to the well-known nature and habits of his kind. The forbearing clemency of the Archbishop would have been far more a subject of marvel to him, had he had room for any thought in his heart or brain save that of the horrible task which lay before him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## AT FERMO.

IN the September of the year in which the events that have been related occurred—about six months, that is to say, after the date of them—the young Marchese Cesare Malatesta found himself in that gloomy old family mansion in the city of Fermo, the dreariness of which as a residence had appeared to him, it may be remembered, so fitly matched with the dreariness of lawful marriage as a condition of life. It *was* a gloomy residence undeniably, and the archiepiscopal city of Fermo is a gloomy city. But it was very grand, very large, and very worshipful. And several generations of the Malatesta race had lived and died there, deeming it better to rule in Fermo than serve in Rome. The present Marchese, however, Cesare's father—the Marchese Salvadore—had thought differently;

and accordingly, with the exception of a couple of months in autumn spent between the old family mansion in the city of Fermo, and the villa on the coast of the Adriatic, which bounded the Malatesta estates for many a mile, lived constantly in the Eternal City.

The habitual absence of the family was not calculated to mitigate the depressing air of dismal sombreness which pervaded the house. Nor did the absence of any lady from the household of the Marchese Salvadore, who had been a widower for many years, fail to contribute to the same result. It was a huge pile of building, showing a range of thirteen large windows on each of the three floors—(counting the ground floor for one)—of its façade, which looked on the narrow, gloomy, miry, tortuous street, which forms the main artery of the city. Fermo is as dull and sombre-looking as a town as the Malatesta *Palazzo* was gloomy and dreary as a dwelling. It is squalid, dirty, dilapidated, poverty-stricken as the cities that live under Pontifical rule are wont to be. Fermo is the wealthiest See and cathedral chapter in all Papal-land; and is, accordingly, one of the shabbiest and most poverty-stricken of its cities. It possesses, however, one thing that no amount of ecclesiastical misgovernment has been able to take from it—it has a magnificent position. Situated about three miles from the coast of the Adriatic, on the summit

of a lofty isolated hill, the topmost rocky peak of which is crowned by the ancient cathedral, it commands a superb panoramic view over the picturesquely broken ground landwards, diversified by a singular number of less lofty eminences, each bearing its townlet on its head—townlets once thriving towns, with names famous, all of them, in mediæval, many of them in Roman, and some in still more remote Etruscan story; over the rich alluvial slip of lowland along the coast; over a boundless sweep of the restless Adriatic; and (in some conditions of the atmosphere) even over the far mountains of opposite Dalmatia. And the huge Malatesta Palace, partaking, as has been said, of the dreary character of the city, partakes also of this its one advantage. Situated in the upper part of the town, close to the base of the protruding topmost rock, on which the cathedral is built, its position and superior height enable the upper story of it to command a view over the rest of the city and over the town walls, which girdle the hill-top at a somewhat lower level, and, consequently, over the immense expanse of coast and sea.

And the advantage thus possessed by the Malatesta Palace had been turned to the best account by some long since forgotten ancestor of the family, whose real and permanent home the Fermo Palace had been, by the construction of an open *loggia* on the top of the lofty pile of building. This ap-

pendage to a city palace, still so frequently seen, and once almost universal in the Tuscan towns, is not common on the other side of the Apennines ; and the unusual construction had evidently been prompted in the case in question by the extreme beauty of the vantage spot thus acquired, and the luxurious enjoyment it promised to the town-pent-up owners of the dwelling. In the warm and lovely autumnal nights, when the streets of Fermo were stifled by the shut-up heat, and reeking with noisome vapours and effluvia of all sorts, the *loggia* on the top of the Malatesta Palace, far above all the multiplied offences to ears, eyes, and nose, with which the close city abounded, luxuriated in the soft but fresh breezes from the Adriatic, and the eye-repose of the outlook over its sail-dotted deep blue waters.

Nevertheless the *loggia* was rarely visited by the present inmates of the palace. The Marchese Salvadore had not once ascended to it since his arrival from Rome, and the Cardinal his brother, who had this year accompanied him from the Eternal City to Fermo, was even less likely to do so.

In the first place, the Marchese was not there for enjoyment. His annual visit to Fermo was a necessary bore and annoyance, only in some degree compensated by the desirableness of quitting Rome during the hottest months of autumn. He was there, firstly, because noblemen and large landed pro-

prietors always did go to their estates in the autumn. Secondly, he was there to grumble with his “*intendente*” over the bills for repairs needed to prevent the old house falling altogether into ruin; to go with his “*fattore*” over his farms, and try to seem as if he knew something about the value and the management of them, and to see reasons for demanding an increase of rental from them; to wholly fail in both these attempts, and to vent his annoyance in impotent snarling and wrangling with the *fattore*, who, he knew very well, was robbing him, but from whose meshes he was quite powerless to escape.

Furthermore, the Marchese was not likely to visit the *loggia* of his palace, because he had a feeling that it was *infra dig.* to go up so many stairs, among garrets and such-like places. The proper place for a nobleman to abide in was the “*piano nobile*”\* of his palace; and there accordingly he abode. In one small corner of it, at least—a little, meanly-furnished room, forming no part of the grand façade, but looking into the interior of the courtyard of the building, and doubly gloomy and dismal accordingly. There the Marchese usually lived during his Fermo season of purgatory on ordinary occasions, while the magnificent suite of fine, but comfortless-looking rooms, which extended along the whole of the front of the *piano*

\* The first floor of an Italian palace is thus called.

*nobile*, as well as the immense central hall of the palace, were kept closely shut.

This was the practice of the Marchese on the ordinary occasions of his visits to Fermo. But there were very visible symptoms that the present was not an ordinary occasion.

In the first place, his Eminence the Cardinal had accompanied his brother from Rome, as has been said. What did this mean? Something very much out of the common way it was quite certain. The head of a noble territorial family in Pope-land is the elder brother, as elsewhere. He is the great man, whose name will be written in capital letters in the genealogical family tree, and who is the patron and superior of his younger brothers. A poor Abate *dei Marchesi Malatesta*, or even one far from poor, is a very different personage from *Il Marchese Malatesta*. But should this Abate attain to a scarlet hat, the relative position of the two brothers is entirely reversed. Such, of course, would be the case to a certain degree if a younger brother among ourselves became a prime minister. But it is the case to a very much greater degree, when an Italian younger brother becomes a Cardinal. All other greatness whatever is wholly eclipsed and thrown into dim background by the greatness of the Sacred College. A Cardinal is the great man, the patron, the providence of his family. A new lustre and increased dignity is

imparted to the race possessing him not only during his sublunary existence, but for all future time. The scarlet hat of him still hangs for many a generation in the family chapel of the neighbouring cathedral suspended from the lofty vault by a long cord—scarlet no longer by reason of the accumulated dust of years, but still authentically the emblem of Eminence long since gone to its reward in a still sacreder college, where dust does not accumulate. The family “*intendente*” in future generations will proudly point out that such a service of plate was added to the family splendours in the time of “the great Cardinal;” or that the carefully shrouded hangings in the state rooms were put up when his Eminence received the congratulations of the provincial world on his first visit to his native place, after his creation; such being, it is to be understood, the phrase by which the scarlet-hatting of him is exclusively spoken of, to the utter neglect and forgetting of that other creation, which only made him a squealing, though well-nigh equally scarlet biped.

And now “the Cardinal” had come for the *villeggiatura* to Fermo, the state bedroom of the *palazzo* having been by special order, sent beforehand by the Marchese, prepared for him. Evidently something was in the wind. Other remarkable phenomena might have been observed also within the Malatesta palace. The shutters of all the

windows from one end to the other of the *piano nobile* were open. Such a thing had not been seen in Fermo since the death of the Marchesa. A number of servants had been brought down from Rome, some in the service of the Cardinal, and some in that of the Marchese, evidently more than could be needed for the service of the noble brothers in the country. But several others also had been hired by the “*intendente*” in Fermo; and on the morning of the September day of which mention has to be made, that busy and anxious official was engaged in the necessary but puzzling task of fitting these recruits with the family liveries.

It was in a fair-sized and very lofty room on the ground floor, looking into the street, that this business was being transacted; not *looking* into the street, by the way, for the window was at such a height from the floor that the tallest man could not look from it into the street; nor could those in the street peep into the room. The great entrance of the palace, under the middle window of the *piano nobile*, with its heavy iron-railed balcony, had six ground-floor windows on each side of it, and each window lighted a separate room. The first of these rooms, on the right-hand side of the entrance, was lettered “*Scrittoio*”\* on the door of it. The next to it was similarly marked “*Intendente*.” The next

\* Writing-room, or office.

was lettered “*Archivio* ;” and the other three “*Magazzino*, 1—2—3.” And it was in one of these that the queer scene which has been mentioned was passing.

One entire side of the room was occupied by a range of deep walnut-wood presses, most of the doors of which were standing open, and exhibiting to view a wonderful quantity of strange-coloured garments. One cupboard was filled with innumerable pairs of very bright yellow breeches ; another, with light green waistcoats ; and two others, with coats mainly of yellow, but with collars, cuffs, and pocket-lappets of green. Both waistcoats and coats were adorned with an immense profusion of very coarse, but very showy and broad, worsted lace of all the colours of the rainbow, and with huge pewter buttons stamped with the armorial bearings of the Malatesta. All the garments were made of an extraordinary coarse serge, and seemed to be so stiff as to act with an entirely incapacitating effect on the limbs incarcerated in them. The names of the men for whom they had originally been made remained very legibly written by the hand of some former “*intendente*” on parchment labels attached to each article. But the original wearers had long since followed former generations of Malatestas to the grave, and now the problem to be solved was how to adapt the gaudily-coloured finery to the limbs of all lengths and sizes of the new comers.

A very powerful odour of camphor pervaded the room, the result of precautions against moths and decay, which had not been entirely successful. Every here and there the thick coarse serge showed symptoms of being honeycombed by those enemies of layers up for the morrow. But, as the "*intendente*" said, the general effect was the object; and such microscopic deficiencies would hardly damage it. But the difficulties attending the assignment of the garments among the men to be clothed was excessive. As fast as each individual was, more or less in defiance of the length and breadth of his body and limbs, inducted into a suit of the Malatesta colours, he was ordered by the old "*intendente*" to be off into the open air to blow the scent of the camphor off him. Seven hapless individuals had thus been bound in green and yellow, and the eighth, an extra tall and stout man, was struggling desperately against an evident case of material impossibility, when the last of the dismissed seven returned to the room with a letter which the post had just brought for the Marchese Cesare.

"Bravo, Giovanni!" said the *intendente*, taking the letter, and examining it curiously; "good lad! This looks as if you had the making of a gentleman's servant in you. You brought me the letter to know what should be done with it. One of those dunderheads of *contadini*\* would have bolted

\* Peasants.

up-stairs with it and stuffed it into the Marchesino's hand in the face of his father and the Cardinal ! But you say to yourself, there's a common sense in these things. How can one tell when and where to hand a letter to a gentleman unless one knows who it comes from ? A big letter, now, with a big seal, and the Sampieri arms on it—that's one thing ! Up with it to the *salotto*,\* and, says you, with a great bow, and loud enough for the Marchese and the Cardinal to hear every word, 'A despatch, Eccellenza, from the noble Marchese Sampieri !' and you hand it him with a flourish. But a little letter with a little seal, and the post-mark *Belfiore presso Foligno*, is quite another matter. Bravo, Giovanni !"

" You see, Signor *Intendente*," replied Giovanni, knocking down his rising fortunes, as so many others have done, by saying a word too much, " the postman gives me the letter at the door, and goes off without saying ever a word who 'tis for ; so, not having the advantage of reading, I brings the letter to you !"

" Oh ! hum ! that was it, was it ? You can't read, eh, Giovanni ? I was thinking you had some gumption in your noddle. Any way, you did well to bring the letter to me. You may leave it with me. Yes, yes !" continued the old man, muttering to himself, " I know who the letter from *Belfiore presso Foligno* is from. I had better give it

\* Small sitting-room.

him when he is alone. Not that the *padrone*\* and his Eminence the Cardinal don't know all about it! To be sure they do! Boys will be boys, and we've all been young once. But decency is decency; and everything always was done decently in this house. This is the third of these little letters! Well, well! It's all according to nature and rule; and no harm's done. Only, these little letters mustn't go on a-coming here; or else there'll be trouble and discredit. Let alone the *padrone*, and specially the Cardinal, to take care of that."

Cesare Malatesta, who, it will have been perceived, had already reached that fated point in his career to which he had looked forward with so much repugnance and resignation, when talking with his friend Carlo Mancini six months ago at Bologna, escaped as quickly as he could from the conference with his father, and that far greater big-wig and family authority, his Cardinal uncle, which he was expected every morning to attend for the discussion of all the infinity of petty details concerning the ceremonial of his coming marriage. As he sauntered down the great staircase, leaving the seniors still in deep consultation on questions of precedence and abstruse points of etiquette as regarding the rival pretensions and dignities of the two houses of Malatesta and Sampieri, the old *intendente* waylaid him at the

\* Master.

foot of the stair, and put the letter into his hand, whispering with ostentatious caution, “A letter from Belfiore, your Excellency ! I thought it best to wait till your lordship came out of the *salotto* to give it you.”

“Thank you, Battista ! It is all right !” said Cesare, taking the letter with an air of as much unconcern as he could muster, but changing colour very perceptibly as he did so—a manifestation which was by no means lost on the old *intendente*. He made a show of strolling on towards the door of the palace ; but as soon as the old man had shuffled back to his magazine of old liveries, family plate, and state trappings of all sorts, he turned, and, springing up the stairs, hurried to the unbroken privacy of the *loggia*, which has been described, to read his letter unobserved and uninterrupted.

A third letter from Belfiore ! Is it necessary to say much about the writer of it ? Having described the spring-tide, is it needful to explain that some six months later, when the wintry winds begin to blow, the leaves will fall ? Or may the fact of the occurrence of that phenomenon be left to the sagacity of the experienced and discriminating reader ?

Yes ! Maddalena’s spring had come, and gone, unreturning ! Her one short summer-time had passed away, and the long winter of the heart, which no re-budding greenery should ever visit,

no warmth of returning spring-tide should ever more brighten, was at hand—all in sequence normal and certain as that of the seasons themselves.

If any traveller journeying from Rome to the Adriatic coast by the celebrated pass of the Furlo, will, when after passing through Foligno he begins to ascend the side of the Apennine, look down into the little valley on his left, he may see the scene on which this tragedy was played out. True, it is very like telling him that he may see men and women with heads on their shoulders, or chimneys with smoke coming out of them! The thing would be to tell him where he might see a city, town, village, or hamlet, in which no such tragedy had been played!

Still, Belfiore is worth looking at for its own sake. It is impossible to conceive a spot better fitted for the first act of the drama that has been spoken of. For the latter ones any place will do! Nestling close to the foot of the Apennine in the *embouchure* of a narrow valley, which there opens into the great basin of the Tiber, it presents to the eye an oasis of green amid the somewhat arid and severe slopes of that district of the Apennine. When the stone-coloured mountain-side above it is parched and cracking in the summer sun, and the wide, flat expanse in front of it, with its cities in the distance, is whity-brown with dust and drouth,

this favoured spot, watered by the rill from the hills which has made the little valley, and sheltered by the overhanging side of the mountain, is always green, and fresh, and umbrageous. The road, though it passes over the hill above in sight of it, does not indiscreetly approach it. Chance cannot bring any one to Belfiore. None come there save those who start from Foligno with the express purpose of going thither.

Cesare Malatesta had more than once noted all these specialities of the place, as he passed in sight of it in journeying to and from Rome ; and thither, on leaving Bologna after the marriage in the Contini Gardens, he had carried his bride. There he had run through the usual gamut-scale of ecstasy, satiety, ennui, irritability, disgust. There Madalena had gone through the corresponding passages of the old, old duet—the dream of perfect bliss ; the first startling pang of the still discredited perception of change ; the gradually growing agony of doubt ; the numbing advance, creeping slow but sure, of the conviction that all was lost ! Thither had followed them the news from Bologna of the discovery of the nullity of the marriage—kept from her by Malatesta for a while, and produced only when the action of the drama had advanced far enough to make it desirable. And thence she was now writing to him for the third time.

It will be seen from the letter which the *intendente* had delivered to Cesare that the waters of despair had not yet completely closed over her. The illimitable trustfulness, which, in such natures as that of Maddalena, necessarily accompanies the giving of their virgin-love, had not yet been wholly killed. She was still struggling with the convictions which grew upon her like the irresistible growth of some hideous malady. When the statement from Bologna, that her marriage was no marriage at all, had been communicated to her, she had recalled to Cesare the solemn words of the Archbishop, so emphatically declaring that the marriage, although reprehensible, could not be broken by any human authority; and had refused to credit the assertion. At the worst, there would but be, she conceived, the necessity of re-performing the ceremony in a more solemn and proper manner. And Cesare had only dared cautiously and gradually to put the idea before her that, if indeed the Bologna ceremony should prove to be invalid, his family would doubtless find the means of effectually preventing him from repeating his marriage with her.

At last, a few weeks before that September day on which her letter, the third she had written him, arrived at Fermo, he had left her. The nearness at hand of the time eventually fixed for his marriage with the heiress of the Sampieri, and the annoyance, which he felt day by day more in-

tolerable, of listening to his victim's anxious hopes and fears; of submitting to endearments which no longer awakened any feeling in him save the conscience-pricking sense of his own unworthiness of them; and of striving to quiet her for the nonce by the reiteration of a string of falsehoods, had combined to make his departure from Belfiore not only a necessity, but a very welcome one. Very soon after his arrival there, when he had learned by letters from Mancini the result of Varani's interview with the Archbishop, and had acquired the certainty that the story of his escapade had been communicated to his family, he had written to his father, telling him of the place of his retreat, and explaining that the little comedy of the marriage had been only one of those stratagems which are "all fair in love affairs." He had begged his father to believe that he was incapable of the wickedness of bringing such a disgrace upon the family name as such a marriage, had it been real, would have inflicted; and had shown, not without some natural manifestations of conscious pride, all the well-contrived precautions he had taken to avoid the possibility of any such danger. Finally, he had expressed his dutiful readiness to merit his father's full forgiveness for his little escapade by submitting entirely to his wishes in the matter of his union with the Contessa Cecilia.

An interchange of several letters between the

father and son had followed, by means of which it was finally arranged that the marriage should be celebrated at Fermo towards the end of the ensuing September; and Cesare had undertaken, less unwillingly than he had once thought it possible for him to go to the fulfilment of his contract with the Lady Cecilia, to present himself at the paternal palace about the beginning of that month.

When that time came, therefore, he had left Belfiore, allowing Maddalena to suppose that his visit to his father was with a view to endeavouring to remove the difficulties in the way of a second more regular marriage between them, and had started on his way to Fermo, fully purposing never to look on her face again.

No communication had passed between Maddalena and her friends at Bologna during the months of her sojourn at Belfiore, for the simple reason that Cesare had prevented any of her letters from leaving that place; and those she had left at Bologna were therefore in total ignorance of where she was. Nevertheless, she had continued to write from time to time, not greatly disturbed by the silence of her friends, partly because it seemed to her likely enough that her mother should not be able to muster energy enough to attempt the strange and unprecedented effort of writing a letter; and partly because an Italian girl of Maddalena's time, country, and social standing,

looked on the adventure of putting a letter into the post-box very much as a seafarer may the dropping of a bottle with an enclosed writing into the sea, considering its arrival at its destination a possibility indeed, but not a thing to be counted on. But as soon as the obstacle to the departure of her letters was removed by the departure of Cesare, the next she committed to the post-box found its way duly enough to Bologna; and the result was a reply, not from her mother, but from Varani.

The letter was a long one; for poor Pietro was a far more ready as well as more elegant penman than a speaker. But the nature of its contents will be readily understood without the necessity of transcribing them. The agony of self-reproach and self-humiliation with which he spoke of his neglect to inform himself more accurately of the requirements of the law in the matter, the generous absence of any word of blame on Malatesta, the advice respecting the absolute necessity of repeating the ceremony, may all be imagined. But at its conclusion the letter mentioned a report—not as having the slightest foundation for it, in fact, or the smallest degree of credibility, but as showing the necessity for a proper and publicly recognised marriage between them—a report that Cesare was about to be married to a lady at Fermo.

Though very far from believing that there could possibly be any truth in such a story, the existence

of it was a painful shock and a source of additional anxiety to her—no, not *anxiety*, she declared to herself. She told herself that she had not a shadow of misgiving upon the subject. She told herself so, and she repeated it to herself very often. Four months ago she would simply have forgotten all about it within an hour after the first blush of indignation at the statement. But those days were gone.

It was on the day after the arrival of Varani's letter, after a night spent in long wakeful thinking, and short fitful dreamings on the subject, that she wrote the letter which Cesare carried up with him to the privacy of the *loggia* at the top of the Palazzo Malatesta.

"I have been looking wistfully," she wrote, "for a line from you, dearest, these many days—ever since my last sad grumbling letter indeed, written just after those few days of pain and fever, which left me weak and craving even more than usual for your dear comfortings, like a spoiled child as I am ! In spite of all her good resolutions and promised prudence, your poor little Lena's heart has of late been very full of strange—I know you will say silly—tremblings and misgivings, which she would hardly have found the courage to tell you, but for her ailing bodily state, to which you will surely ascribe them. The days have gone creeping on as usual, my own, very quietly, somewhat sadly. Always the same things

doing at the same times and in the same places. You know them all so well ! The morning mass at Santa Felicità, the stitching in the *loggia*, the silent meals, the half-hour's evening walk by the little brook,—it has been all the same, all with the light of life shut out from it. And, besides that, there has come of late a dread, a craving anxiety about our future, something like what I used to feel long, long years ago as a child, when passing at night through that cold black corridor at home, I fancied it full of hissing whispers and trailing garments, and would dart like a bird towards the bright chink in the bedroom door to escape from my ghostly pursuers. Have I grown a child again ? Have I been haunted by sick fancies ? Was I only wearying overmuch for your coming, and selfishly counting the minutes, as I do your dear little rosary beads, with a prayer and a wish for every one ? Or was there a shadow of truth in these forebodings—a shadow of sorrow at hand, great, terrible sorrow ? Oh, my beloved ! speak to me, speak to me, I beseech you, as if you were here beside me now with your hand in mine, and my eyes searching into yours for hope and help. Have I no cause for fear ? Say so, my husband, say so ; and I will trust you, as I have ever done, fully, lovingly, without a thought of doubt. Do not be angry with me ! Do not jest with me, nor turn scornfully away ; but tell me there is no fear lying in wait in

our future ! Tell it me in mercy, for the sake of that precious life which is wrapped in mine. Shall I vex you by telling you what has caused these fancies and terrors to take a more tangible and terrible shape ? I think I ought to do so ; for surely there ought to be no secrets between us. I have had a letter from home—the first since I left it—full of the misfortune which we know of, my own, of course. But, besides this, there is at the end a frightful, hideous rumour, a base lie, which surely I should have been spared had the teller known anything of the love I bear you—the love we bear each other—is it not so ? I hardly meant to speak to you of this when I began to write ; for I would not inflict on you any portion of the pain it has caused me. But, somehow, it has broken from me ; I know not why. Do not imagine that I for an instant believe the monstrous tale, the stuff they have talked, or any other that wrongs your faith and love for your Lena. But speak to me, beloved ! Speak to me, and the clouds will be scattered away as when the sun shines. I want your voice ! I want one look, one kiss of your dear lips to give me back my happiness —*not* my faith in you ; for that and my love are one ! ”

This letter was not, under the circumstances, pleasant reading for the gentleman to whom it was addressed. And the result, inevitable in the case

of such a man, was a considerable amount of irritation against the writer.

"It is all very well," he muttered to himself as he walked up and down the *loggia*, twisting Madalena's letter in his hands; "it is all very well for her to try and keep up the comedy. But one of two things! Either, as my father says, she and her family knew very well, or at least suspected, that a marriage made in half a minute in a garden was all bosh, and only wanted it as an excuse to save her character and give her a hold upon me; or, as the Cardinal says, she wickedly plotted to make a marriage which she must have known was most abominable, and would make the misery of all concerned! One of the two! What ought she to expect? She is lucky to have fallen into the hands of worthy and conscientious people, who will make a better future for her than any she was ever entitled to look forward to. Any way, my duty is clear! And God knows it is not a pleasant one! But I go straight forward and do it. It is anything but a path of roses for me? Why should she expect that there are to be no thorns for her? Wants me to speak to her, and kiss her, and comfort her! Very likely! No doubt! And should not I like to go back and stay with her a day or two—or say a week, ay, or a month—very well. I swear I should like nothing better! What a relief! instead of going through all this intermi-

nable bore, to wind up by taking Cecilia Sampieri for a wife! Of course I should like it; but I can't do it. I have my path chalked out for me, and my duty to do! And, besides, the matter is all out of my hands now. And it is happy for Maddalena that I have been thoughtful for her instead of selfish in putting it out of my own hands. If I had kept on with her, seeing her from time to time, as it might have been very pleasant to do, what would have become of her and her child in the end? As it is, *babbo*\* and the Cardinal will make it all right between them. The Cardinal promises to take care of her, and *babbo* will undertake the maintenance of the child, if I promise never to see her again. Was it for her good or for my pleasure that I promised? If Maddalena has a spark of reason in her, she must feel, whatever she may say, that I have behaved uniformly well to her in this business. And now, as to what is to be done? I should not wonder if she came bolting after me here, if she gets desperate! A pretty piece of work that would be! I think the best plan would be to tell the old ones of this letter, and let them know that it would be best to see to the matter at once."

So, after a little further meditation, Cesare descended to the *salotto*, where the Marchese and the

\* The familiar term for father, answering to its derivative "daddy."

Cardinal were giving audience to the *intendente*, and discussing some of the innumerable points of deep interest connected with the coming ceremony.

"Here is a pretty business," said his father, with much irritation in his manner, as he entered the room; "Battista here has just discovered that the Sampieri mean to send six carriages, all with the family liveries, eighteen suits in all, and we can make but five, even with the old travelling berlins! I am sure I don't know what is to be done! The Cardinal is good enough to propose having a second carriage of his sent from Rome. It will cost a pretty penny; but I don't see anything else for it. We have plenty of liveries, in better condition, too, than those old Sampieri rags; which I happen to know were made when old Cardinal Muzio Sampieri was created by Pope Clement in 1773. And of course the Cardinal's carriage will figure better than anything they can show."

"If his Eminence will only condescend," said old Battista, looking wistfully to the great man, "to so signal a favour, we should put them down—we should crush them as flat as that," striking one hand on the palm of the other as he spoke.

"My brother knows how much I have the credit of the family at heart," said the Cardinal, in a slightly lisping voice of that slobbering quality which often belongs to a very fat and jowly face; "so

let the message be sent to Rome, and no more be said about it."

"Your Eminence shall be obeyed," said old Battista, shuffling from the room in great glee.

And then Cesare opened the business on which he was intent. He felt no embarrassment in speaking of the subject, for all the disagreeables attending the discussion of the matter with his elders had been gone through; and both the lay and the clerical members of the family council had readily admitted that the thoughtful care which the young man had taken to prevent any disgrace arising to the family name from his juvenile errors, merited a lenient consideration of them. The Cardinal had spoken, indeed, a few grave official words in a grave official tone, respecting the sin of simulating a sacrament of the Church; but had passed quickly over that part of the subject, remarking that it was matter which must be settled between the young man and his——confessor. And then it had been arranged, that if he would testify his repentance by solemnly promising never to see the dangerous woman who had led him astray again, all further difficulty in the matter should be spared him, by the care of his father and his excellent uncle, in the manner above mentioned.

On hearing his present account of the state of things at Belfiore, both the elders agreed with him that it was highly desirable that precautionary measures for the prevention of any possible scan-

dal should be taken at once. And the Cardinal, highly eulogising his nephew's prudence and discretion, declared that he was quite ready to perform his part of the compact, and to assume at once the care and the cost of providing for Madalena's future.

"As it happens," he said, "I have, fortunately, an opportunity of doing so in the most desirable and unexceptionable manner. The Superior of the Ursulines at Ascoli, is—a person who will have pleasure in obliging me. The dower required in the convent is not a large one. It will be a most fitting place and opportunity for this unhappy young woman to repent of and cancel her sin. It would be desirable on many grounds that she should be brought to see that her best happiness would lie in assuming the veil; and I can depend on the Superior of the Ursulines at Ascoli to exert herself to this good end. My brother will charge himself, as agreed, with the woman's child when it shall be born; and I must have her placed in proper care in Rome till that time. The best plan will be for me to write at once to my *procuratore* at Rome, an excellent, pious, and discreet man, on whose trustworthiness I can entirely depend, and direct him to proceed at once to Belfiore, and take the woman to Rome. You had better write a line—a mere line—enjoining her to submit herself entirely to his guidance."

The Cardinal pushed the writing materials which

were on the table across to his nephew, for him to write the “mere line,” much as if it had been a quittance to an account. Cesare took the pen in hand, but the “mere line” was not forthcoming. So after writing his own letter to his “*procuratore*,” his Eminence took the sheet of paper from before his nephew with a “pish!” and scribbled the following words :

“ To MADDALENA TACCA,—

“ This is to desire that, on its being presented to you by Dr. Lorenzo Bonaffi, you will at once put yourself entirely into his hands and under his guidance. You will see the absolute necessity of doing so from the commission that has been given him to pay all outstanding bills at Belfiore, and give up the apartment to the landlady.”

“ There,” said the Cardinal, “ just copy and sign that.” And Cesare, finding himself wholly unable to devise any less brutal way of doing the brutal deed that lay in his “ path of duty,” did copy and sign it, venturing only to substitute “ Dear Maddalena,” for the heading “ To Maddalena Tacca.”

So the letter was enclosed in that containing the Cardinal’s directions to his agent, and directed to Dr. Lorenzo Bonaffi in Rome; and the family conclave having thus settled the fate of Maddalena and her child, were at liberty to return to the

more important consideration of the coming grand struggle with the Sampieri for the superiority in carriages, liveries, flunkeys, and flunkeyism in every kind.

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The facts remaining to complete the series of events connected with this first period of the present history with which it is necessary that the reader should be made acquainted, may be told in a very few words.

The alliance between the Malatesta and Sampieri families was completed with a rivalry of pride, pomp, circumstance, on either side, which was highly edifying to all the world of Fermo.

The Cardinal's second carriage duly arrived, and figured with exceeding effect in the show.

In due time, also, on the 29th of September in the following year that is to say, an heir was born of the Marchese Cecilia Malatesta, *nata* Sampieri, to the Malatesta name and estates. He was christened by the old family name of Alfonso, and was, of course, the most lovely baby that the sun had ever shone on.

In due time, also, that is to say on the 20th of December, 1828, was born the son of the bond-woman, who was heir to nothing at all in this world, and who was pronounced to be lovely by no voice, and felt to be precious by no heart, save by that one which was well-nigh broken by the en-

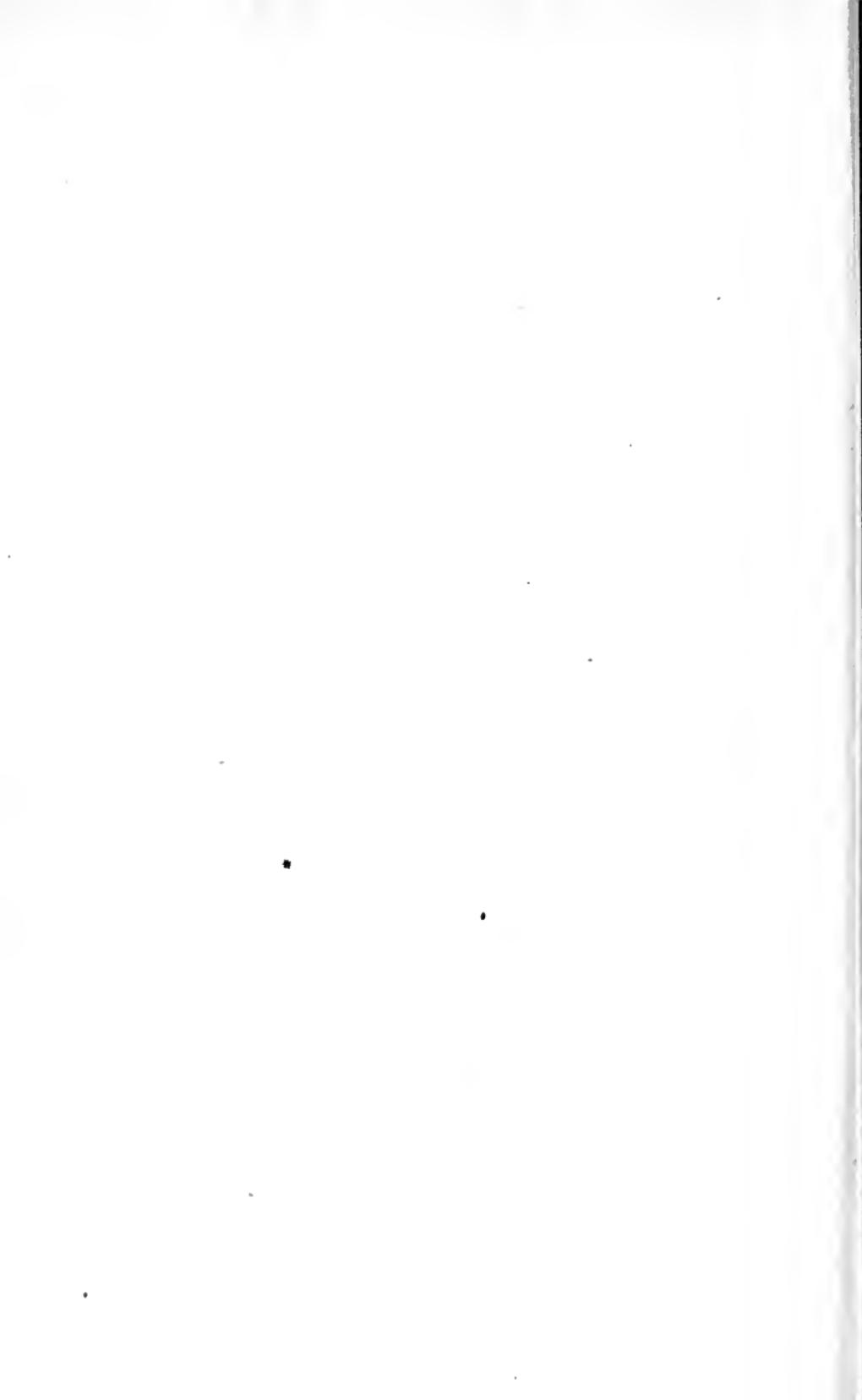
forced parting with him. He was christened Giulio, because that is the name of the saint whose “day” in the calendar falls at that date. Though heir to nothing, he was supplied by the munificence of the Marchese Salvadore Malatesta, according to his promise, with such modicum of food and shelter as sufficed to keep the life in the infant’s body, and to forward him on his way towards manhood.

The Superior of the convent of Ursulines at Ascoli, an obscure and very remote little town on the coast of the Adriatic, about forty miles south of Fermo, and close to the Neapolitan frontier, abundantly justified the confidence placed in her by the Cardinal Malatesta. Her pious exhortations, the judicious discipline of her convent, and the patient’s broken-hearted despair of that world which had collapsed in ruin around her, produced the end in view; and before the close of the second year from the time she was received into the nunnery, Maddalena had taken the black veil.

## BOOK II.

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THE CARNIVAL AT FLORENCE IN 1848.



## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE PALAZZO BRANCACCI.

THE curtain rising for the second act of our drama discovers Florence at the beginning of the Carnival of 1848.

A very remarkable and memorable Carnival among all other Carnivals was that of 1848, not in Florence only, but in all other parts of Italy. Never did a people give themselves up with such unanimity of enthusiasm to rejoicings, mutual congratulations, and hopeful anticipations of all kinds. Never did revellers think so little of the long Lenten-tide that was to follow. For the revel of that mad Carnival-time was not confined to the usual haunts and spheres of holiday-keeping according to the calendar. It pervaded every part of the national life, and thrilled every fibre of the body social. Never were the masquers so num-

rous. Pope Pius the Ninth entered into the spirit of the time with a degree of *entrain* that encouraged every one to join in the fun. With some fragments of old costumes of the time of Rienzi, and a cap of liberty drawn over the tiara, he completely took in everybody he spoke to. Other crowned heads, in order to "look like the time," joined in the frolic, masquerading somewhat more clumsily than his Holiness, and rather anxious, the while, for Shrove-tide. It was a rare time! Some there were who stood doubtfully by, while the revellers danced and shouted and sang, and tossed their caps into the air, and would fain have told them of the time when the masqueraders would take off their masks, when the Carnival *falsetto* voices would resume their natural tone, when the time for penance and mortification would begin. But the masses of the people were persuaded, that now at length the time was definitively come when cheesecakes would grow on the roadside bushes, and every brook run custard. And the grand universal Carnival-time of Italy was to be bounded by no narrow calendar limits, but was to last till the crack of doom. But the Lenten-time soon came;—and it lasted for ten years! And the brooks soon ran with something else than custard! —with something that they have to run with mostly in this sublunary world of ours, before the time for cakes and custard comes.

It was a glorious time, however, that Carnival of 1848, as long as it lasted! Great was the joy, greater still the high hopes, greatest of all and very touching the illimitable faith! It *did* move mountains; but wavering when the time of hard trial came, the mountains rolled back into their places—for a while!

On one of the earliest days of this memorable Carnival, two young men were talking together in a small bed-chamber on the second floor of the Brancacci Palace, in the Via Larga of Florence. The owner of the *palazzo*, and inhabitant of the second floor of it, was the Marchese Florimond Brancacci, Knight of Malta, a bachelor of course, sixty years of age according to the record of the baptismal registers at St. Giovanni,—forty-three by his own reckoning and by social courtesy. Though he was thus in one point of view born some seventeen years too soon, yet in another sense he had come into the world a good half-century too late. For though the Marchese Florimond was one of those amiable individuals who are always willing to do their best to “look like the time,” whatever it may be, yet, to say the truth, he felt somewhat mystified and basketed by all that was going on around him. He supposed it was all right. The Marchese Florimond always supposed that everything was all right. Serene Highnesses in Phrygian caps were a strange and startling

sight to be sure, not very intelligible to the Brancacci philosophy. But since Phrygian caps were the mode in such quarters in these stages of the world's merry history, *viva la moda!* a *couvercle* of the new fashion jauntily placed on the top of the Marchese Florimond's wig—ambrosial curls, would be quite as becoming wear, he flattered himself, as it could be when perched on the spikes of a coronet.

The Brancacci *palazzo* was a small snug house in the Via Larga, and the first floor was let at a high rent to a Russian bachelor, or at least wifeless Prince. But the Marchese being very comfortably off, and having nobody in the world to think of but himself and one nephew, inhabited the second floor, instead of letting that also, and retiring himself to the third, as most Tuscan bachelor house-owners would have done in similar circumstances.

It seems to me that I have already given the reader a tolerably full account, moral, physical, social, and intellectual, of the Marchese Florimond Brancacci. A few special particulars may, however, be mentioned for the completion of the picture.

He was a small, spare, wiry, active little old gentleman; had been handsome in the days when, according to his own count of time, he must have been about ten years old; and was most wonder-

fully "well preserved." Indeed, this miracle of self-preservation, as it had been the great object, so it was the great triumph of his life. His life had not been unmarked by other triumphs, however. He was and had for many years been a chamberlain at the Grand-Ducal Court; and was thought to walk backwards out of a room more gracefully than any other man in Europe. For nearly half a century he had been acknowledged to be the best-dressed man in Florence. He was still as upright as ever; and if knees and hips did perform their functions somewhat stiffly and rustily, as he sunned himself, dapper cane in hand, on the winter walk by the bank of the Arno in the Cascine,\* the defect was, with due care, not such as necessarily to interfere with the admirable set of either coat or trousers. And when towards noon the Marchese Florimond was cleverly set on end among the rest of the Florentine *jeunesse d'orée* in front of Doney's Café, with his two elegantly-clad legs a little apart, his exquisitely-varnished boots well planted on the level flagstones, and his Parisian hat carefully set on the top of the glossy curls bulging out from under either side of it, he could criticise the passing carriages, and exchange greetings with their fair occupants by waving the fingers of his unexceptionally-gloved hand in the graceful Tuscan fashion, with the best of them.

\* The Florentine Hyde Park.

In one respect only had the detestable old fellow with the scythe and hour-glass succeeded in discomfiting the Marchese Florimond. He could not contrive to hold his eye-glass between his eyebrow and the muscles of his somewhat sunken cheeks. And this was a matter of lasting grief to him, the more tormenting, because he did not dare to utter any of the anathemas against the barbarous fashion with which his heart was full.

Indeed, this may be said to have been the fault which the Marchese Florimond had to find with the constitution of things in this world, and with his position in the centre of them. Tuscany was to him the centre and choicest spot of earth's surface—Florence of Tuscany—the Via Larga of Florence—and the Palazzo Brancacci of the Via Larga! In addition to all which it may be said that all Florence considered the Marchese Florimond Brancacci to have done his duty creditably in every relation of life in which his lot had placed him. He was a good-natured master to his servants, an intensely courtly chamberlain to his sovereign, was and had been for more than thirty years the most devotedly faithful cavaliere servente (*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*) of the peerless Marchesa Zenobia Altamari, and was, according to the emphatic testimony of his nephew Carlo, the model of perfection in all avuncular duties and functions.

It will be chiefly in the two latter relationships

that we shall have an opportunity of seeing something more of the Marchese Florimond.

This nephew Carlo was one of the two young men whom the rising of our curtain discovered in his own room in the comfortable apartment of his uncle in the Palazzo Brancacci; and he was engaged in cordially welcoming the other, who had evidently just arrived from a journey. They were both quite young men, the new comer say twenty, and Carlo Brancacci perhaps a year younger; the former, a tall, dark, and very singularly handsome youth, with a noble forehead, long wavy dark brown hair, fine frankly-opened fearless eyes. Bold, self-asserting eyes! That was the first quality in them which struck one looking at them for the first time. A shrewd observer of them would have said that the mental attitude of resistance and defiance was familiar to their owner. But a further knowledge of them would have shown him that they were capable of expressing, and not unwont to express, moods of tenderness and of subjective meditation. They were often sad, and sometimes inexpressibly loving eyes. The mouth was one of rare sweetness, and was shaded by the slight black line of a youthful moustache. Carlo Brancacci was a good-looking lad too; but in a very different style from the far superior beauty of his friend. He was fair and light-haired, with a pink and white complexion as delicately beautiful as that of a girl—

a type which is found more frequently among the Italians, especially of the upper classes, than we northerns are apt to imagine. Bright, dancing, laughing blue eyes, the best-tempered mouth in the world, and a roly-poly abundance of flesh both in face and figure, left no possibility of doubting that Carlo Brancacci was one of those happy fellows destined by nature to be equally favourites with men and women, and with themselves.

"Now, old fellow!" said he to his companion, "you know what you are come to Florence for?"

"Mainly because you insisted on my doing so, Carlo!" replied his friend, with a smile.

"And I insisted on it mainly because I was persuaded that a good strong dose of Carnival-keeping would be good for your constitution. But the medicine to do good must be taken with proper accompaniments of regimen, and in a fitting condition of the mental stomach. I must have no social—or indeed any other—philosophising, no fault-finding with any portion of the existing arrangements of this sublunary existence, no moralising, as little as may be of politics, and upon the whole as little thought of the morrow, or of the yesterday, as can be managed. All these things are to be left at Pisa, where they may be found again, if absolutely necessary, at the beginning of next term."

"Here I am, at your bidding, Carlo *mio*," re-

plied the other, smilingly, but yet less wholly light-heartedly than his friend ; “and I suppose I should have had to go anywhere else that you bade me. But, to tell the truth, I have a little misgiving about quartering myself on your uncle’s hospitality for all the Carnival. I think we ought to modify our programme a little. Remember, that he never set eyes on me, or heard of me in his life !”

“ Now then, you are beginning to take thought for the morrow, and even for the days after !—and, as people generally do when they are guilty of that vice, blundering. My uncle has never seen you, true ! But I don’t think the look of you will frighten him. And as for not having heard of you, why, what do you take me for ? Do you think that I have an acquaintance in all Florence, let alone my own uncle, who is father and mother and uncle and aunt too to me, who has not heard of the man who risked and all but sacrificed his life to save mine, when I was ass enough to all but drown myself at Gombo ?\* Heard of you ! I should think they had, too. And strange as it seems to you—and it *is* odd, I must admit—my uncle has a notion that by fishing me out of the water before I was quite done for, you did him a good turn, and one which deserves his life-long gratitude. *I* can’t see that there was any good done. But that’s his feeling about it.”

\* A small bathing-place on the coast, near Pisa.

" You should not have made a mountain out of a molehill ! But in all seriousness, Carlo, do you not think that we are bound, or I should say rather that I am bound, to let your uncle know the unhappy position in which I am placed by the circumstances of my birth. I cannot consent that he should be allowed to suppose that he is receiving a legitimate member of the Malatesta family. I am none such, you know, in the world's eye."

" There you go plunging into the next forbidden sin of social philosophising. There is one quality which I will guarantee your possessing in a perfection worthy of the most legitimate heir of all the Malatestas since the Flood ;—and that is, pride, which beats Lucifer's hollow. But make yourself easy. My uncle knows all about it. Why ! bless your heart ! we have talked you all over a dozen times."

A sudden and transient flush passed over the young man's pale cheek, which showed that, though he was unquestionably relieved by his friend's confession, the relief was not unaccompanied by a feeling of pain.

" You seriously mean to assure me," he said, " that the Marchese Florimond is aware that I am the illegitimate son of a mother whom I have never known, of whose condition and name even I am utterly ignorant, of whom I do not know so much as whether she is living or dead ; that though

recognised as a son of the present Marchese, and for the present supported by his charity, till I may be able to earn my own bread, I have never even seen him to my knowledge; that I have neither port nor lot in the family ‘respectability;’ and that I am essentially an outcast and a vagabond.”

“ Every bit of it, my dear Giulio, with the exception of the vagabondage, of which I was not aware; but which shall be particularly notified to him if you desire it. Yes, he knows it all well enough. But, bless your heart! we democratic Tuscans, and especially we easy-going *pococurante* Florentines, do not trouble our heads so much about such matters as you stiff-backed formal Romans. We are the genuine descendants of the old republican traders after all! And when we find such a fellow as you among us, it’s very little we trouble ourselves about his father and mother; and as to asking whether they were married or not—*che!*”

“ For all that, I should not quite like to enter any house under false colours!” persisted Malatesta.

“ O! was there ever such a thorny animal! There shall be no false colours! *Per Bacco!* you shall be introduced, like the by-blows of the French kings used to be, as ‘The Bastard of Fermo,’ if you insist on it.”

“ Those are words which such as you may joke with, Carlo; but they are far too sharp for such as

I to play with," said Giulio, as his cheek flushed again, and a shade passed over his brow.

"There goes the proud blood, Malatesta, every drop of it, I'll answer for it! Now you would quarrel with me for a *soldo*, old fellow, if I was a quarrelable man. Luckily, nobody has ever yet been able to do that," said Carlo, with perfect *insouciance*. "But I tell you," he continued, "and I know what I am saying, that you are bothering yourself about nothing. Besides, *cospetto!*\* are we not at the dawn of the new era? Are we not all going to be free and equal?—the best man to go in and win, the prettiest fellow to have the prettiest girl, the bravest to be general-in-chief, and the cleverest rogue prime minister? Have I not heard you preach all that a hundred times?"

"Very likely! but there is much difference between preaching and practising, as we all know," replied Giulio, smiling somewhat sadly; "but don't think," he added, more earnestly, "that I don't stand by my flag! There would be nothing to prevent me from going to the top of the *Campanile* at Pisa some fine morning, and coming down outside and headforemost, if it were not for the hope that a day is really at hand when an Italian

\* A common interjection. *Cospetto* is "sight," or "view;" *al vostro cospetto*, "in spite of you!" Hence the use of the word as an exclamation, answering, perhaps, to "Zooks!" or the like.

man with an Italian heart and brain may be able to carve out for himself a fair place in the world's sunshine."

"I for one," rejoined Carlo, affectionately, "would back you to do so against all the most legitimate Malatestas in Fermo! And now, dear old fellow, I'll show you your room. It's alongside of this, and just such another. I should have gone to sleep an hour ago if I had been talking to anybody but you. To-morrow morning you shall make acquaintance with my uncle in due form. He's on duty to-night!"

"What, at Court?" asked Giulio.

"No! a deuced deal harder work than that! In attendance at the Marchesa Zenobia's opera-box! *Povero zio!*\* There never was such a martyr to a high sense of duty! Good night, old fellow!"

"Good night, dear Carlo! What time shall you be stirring in the morning?"

"Oh, not before nine!"

"Lazy dog! Well! I suppose I may get out, and have a look at the city before that? I will be back by nine."

"*Padronissimo! caro mio.*"†

And so the young men parted for the night.

\* My poor uncle!

† *Padrone*, master. The word is used thus absolutely in the sense of "at your pleasure!" "at your service!" and "padronissimo" is the jocularly used superlative.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CONTESSA ZENOBLA.

IN every relation in life the Marchese Florimond Brancacci had been unexceptionable, as has been declared. Specially exemplary had he been for many long years in the sight and to the admiration of all Florence, as the cavaliere servente of the noble and much-respected lady the Contessa Zenobia Altamari.

*Cavaliere servente!* That means serving cavalier. And an arduous, a hard, and, as Carlo Brancacci declared, a bitter service it was! Jacob, we know, served for Rachel seven years. The Marchese Florimond served for the Contessa Zenobia more than thirty. We know what the reward was in the former case. It is by no means equally clear what it was, or whether it was any, in the second case. Mankind is sinful to the north

and to the south of the Alps. And different societies have different means for the repression of secret sins. In our own island, Mrs. Grundy is an institution, and a very powerful one. In Italy, her functions belong to the confessional, which may be admitted to have less terrors at its disposal. Different societies have different social theories. In Italy, matters of morality are considered to be strictly between a man and—his confessor; as the Cardinal Malatesta had said to his erring nephew.

But as for the special case of the Marchese Florimond and the Contessa Zenobia, my impression is, and Carlo Brancacci used to say that he was quite sure—But there!—what business have we with any impressions upon the subject? All that Florence knew, or cared to know, of the matter was, that the Marchese Florimond had had, during the last thirty years, millions of opportunities of squeezing the Contessa Zenobia's—elbow, if it so pleased him to do. Her hand? *Fi donc!* By right of this customary feudal service, as one may call it, of elbow touching, the Marchese was known and recognised to be the “serving cavalier” of the Contessa. And truly, faithfully, and indefatigably did he perform his service.

I have heard of English husbands who have felt the matrimonial yoke gall them; who have even

considered that their life was made a burden to them by reason of the tale of bricks exacted, and the long suffering expected from them. It were to be wished that those unresigned British Benedicts could have an opportunity of watching a month or so of the life of the Marchese Florimond! They imagine, perhaps, that matutinal curl-papers and temper to match are exclusively incidental to the matrimonial status. Do they think that those evils would be rendered more tolerable by the necessity of turning out of one's own house in all weathers to go in search of them? Perhaps they conceive that to perform the functions of half a dozen grooms of the chamber, when the mistress of the mansion receives her friends, and to receive the treatment of one, minus the salary, is the appointed lot of none in this world save slaves chained to the Matrimonial oar? I wish they could see the Marchese Florimond on the reception-nights of the Contessa Zenobia! And I should like to be shown the British husband who, for thirty years, despite increasing rheumatism, despite the draughts of passages and lobbies, and the blasts of *tramontana* winds, has never been known to be absent from duty at step of carriage or door of opera-box! All this and much more was expected from a faithful "cavaliere servente" *de la vieille roche*. All this and much more the Marchese Florimond had zealously and conscien-

tiously performed. How often would the weary little feet in their tight lustrous boots have fain been toasting themselves in slippers at a comfortable fire at home when they were executing exquisite bows at carriage doors? How often has the bald old head, smirking briskly in the small hours beneath its well-curled locks, longed for the moment when at length it might change them for a nightcap? And all to be done, not only with a good grace, but as if it were the culminating point of earthly felicity to be permitted to do them!

“Duram servit servitatem!” The echo of the phrase comes to my mind across the chasm of years from dim Latin grammar reminiscences, as I think of the Marchese Florimond and the Contessa Zenobia. “He served a hard servitude;”—he did indeed.

The Contessa Zenobia Altamari, a Tozzinghi by birth, had been left a childless widow after a very brief period of married life. She had been born fifty-four years before the time of which we are speaking, but she was only thirty-eight years old; the same courteous and amiable fiction having been adopted in her case as in that of the Marchese Florimond, for the purpose of putting down the testimony of the brutal old hour-glass holder by dint of pertinacious assertion. She had never been a beauty, although her face was not deficient in striking, and even fine

features. The main fault of them was, that they were all too large for her small person. And it was a further misfortune that the least pleasing among them was that which the lapse of time had done the least to mitigate. The large beaky Roman nose, which caused the whole physiognomy to resemble that of a parrot, remained in all the perfection of its development. Though the fine black eyes had lost somewhat of their fire, they were very fine eyes still, despite the ill nature of those who asserted that they would be much more tolerable if their expression had been toned down to about half its usual intensity. The Contessa always took the greatest care of her complexion; and if it had not been that a taste for high colour grows upon the eye as surely as a taste for strong flavours on the palate, the result would have been entirely satisfactory. As it was, the effect produced contributed to intensify the impression of exaggeration which the appearance of the Contessa Zenobia was, in its entirety, calculated to create. The mouth also contributed its share to the same unfortunate result. It was a beautifully-formed mouth, though large. But art, in supplying it with a magnificent garniture of the finest teeth, had just a shade overstepped the modesty of nature. And the consequence was, that the teeth seemed too brilliantly white, and too faultlessly regular. And, though it cannot be doubted that the

artist had accurately conformed himself to nature's practice in this respect, these beautiful teeth somehow or other gave the beholder of them an idea that they were abnormally numerous. Altogether, there appeared to be too much of a good thing.

Then, again, it was no fault of the Contessa, but simply and purely a misfortune, that the general effect thus produced was infelicitously heightened by the junction of this—shall I say powerful?—head and physiognomy to a diminutive figure. The Contessa Zenobia had been celebrated in days unforgotten by her, however much they might have been forgotten by others, for the fairy-like beauty of this little figure—for the statuesque perfection of the form of neck and shoulders, for the admirable hand and arm, and the no less admirable foot and leg. And the light little figure was still there. But, alack! slenderness had become scragginess; litheness had turned to rigidity; joints had grown bigger, and the fleshy integuments of them more stant. But the Contessa Zenobia was not aware of the extent of the change that had been produced in all these respects, and laboured under the grievously erroneous impression that any slight deterioration of charm which these beauties had suffered from the touch of time, might be compensated by an increased liberality in the display of them.

Female education in Italy is still very far from

being what the friends of Italy would wish to see it ; and half a century ago it was incalculably worse than it is now. And the early years of the Contessa Zenobia had been passed in the worst period of all. The absolute blank paper ignorance of the previous generation had begun to be stained, rather than enlightened, by the influence of the newly-imported French influences. The Italian women of the previous generation had at least been simple, unaffected, and unpretentious. They knew absolutely nothing, and had not the smallest conception that it behoved them to know anything save the proper management of their fans, smiles, tuckers, hearts, and eyes. A somewhat more instructed simplicity is still the peculiar charm of the women of Italy ; and it is a potent one ! But this charmingly unpretentious simplicity was fatally put to flight by the new French philosophy and manners, more especially in the classes high enough to be more immediately exposed to its influence. As an Italian woman *au natural* (in point of intelligence once upon a time, and in other respects always) is one of the most charming of her sex, so an Italian woman Frenchified, and endeavouring to be French instead of Italian, is one of the most ridiculous and detestable.

It is almost too hard upon the Contessa Zenobia, immediately after using such strong language, to say that *she* was an Italian woman striving to ap-

pear French. But in truth that was the fact. It was the mode in Florence to ape French manners, French dresses, French ideas, and French phrases, when the Lady Zenobia was young. That mode had long since passed away (save as regards the dresses) in the course of the fifty-five years which it had taken to make Zenobia thirty-eight years old. But she was still and ever the same (French) fairy-like creature that she had been in the days of the First Empire—rather too much like a fairy in the *first* scene of a Christmas pantomime, while the big comic heads are still on, instead of in the last scene, when the semi-divine creature is seen in her own proper form and radiance—but still every inch a fairy.

It has been said that the Contessa Zenobia was very ignorant. The real state of the case, however, was worse than is properly represented by such a statement. Supposing a pendulum to be swinging on a dial-plate marked with the degrees of human knowledge, it ought to point to perfect ignorance when lying at rest in coincidence with the plumb-line. Rising from this in one direction—to the right, we will say—it would swing up to the most godlike heights of human attainment; and in the opposite direction—to the left—to the extremity of human error and perversity. Well, such a pendulum set to gauge the intelligence of the Contessa Zenobia, would have swung somewhat to the left

of the plumb-line. Not that it would have swung in that direction up to any such high grades of the imagined scale as to indicate great moral perversity. For in truth, poor Zenobia had not, as the phrase goes, much harm in her. But all the little deviation from the exact plumb-line of pure ignorance would have been steadily on that side. She mis-knew a little French, affecting exceedingly the use of scrap phrases of it, and using them almost always with a curious infelicity. The “glory” of the Empire in turning Europe into one great military camp had curiously imparted a taste of camp coarseness to the society of the days of the Contessa Zenobia’s youth ; a sort of *gaillardise*, with a dash of *vivandière* flavour in it, not entirely pleasing to all palates even when fresh, and sorely displeasing to all when half a century stale. But this peculiar tone of manner, though wholly unlike anything to be seen in the young world around her, made part of the Contessa Zenobia’s get-up for her unchanging part of frolic youthfulness ; and was regularly assumed by her, together with the wreaths and ringlets, wondrously low-cut dresses, and boots, which completed her make-up for the evening and the morning (not the morning and the evening) which made her working day. Her boots ! Yes, her boots ! For it must be explained that the Contessa always wore boots—of white satin in the evening. In the first place, they enabled her to

add an inch or so to her stature. In the second place, there seemed to her a certain fitness in that article of costume to the embodiment and presentation of the semi-military style of manner and character which she affected. Above all, in the third place, the Contessa Zenobia had still a small foot, and high, well-arched instep. It was true—and, perhaps, it was the bitterest drop in her cup of life—that the cruel years, reckon them how she would, had unmistakably caused the joint of the great toe to enlarge itself in such a fatally uncompressible manner, as to produce a detestable bunch in the white-satin integument, which no art could dissimulate. But the ankle above was as slender as ever; and upon the whole, the boot, with its little foot in it, was still one of the “points” to which the Contessa was not unwilling to call attention.

I was speaking of the intellectual and moral character of the Lady Zenobia, when, somehow or other, I stumbled over the protruding satin boot—not having been thrown much out of the direct tenor of my discourse, perhaps, by the accident. For the rest, it may be mentioned that, among the misinformation which made the furniture of her mind, she had stored up certain odds and ends of the names of French books and writers, which she produced frequently in a very singular manner. Though guiltless of having ever read a line of the French philosopher’s sense or his nonsense, she was

very fond of speaking of Voltaire; and—probably from the unconscious remembrance of some naughty mystification by some roué French *militaire* a quarter of a century or more ago—she generally referred to him as “the inspired author of the Pucelle!”

It would certainly have been an abuse of terms to call the Contessa Zenobia a strong-minded woman—even had the term been invented in her day—for she was manifestly a remarkably weak-minded woman. Neither would it have been just to accuse her of free-thinking tendencies; for she could hardly have been said to think at all. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that she affected a sort of freedom and dashing *gaillardise* of speech and practice in matters of religion, which, however, was not incompatible with a feeling of awe and much fear of her religious director, of a kind exactly the same as that felt by a red Indian for his “medicine-man.” It seemed, I take it, to the Contessa Zenobia, that religion was properly and exclusively an affair of the old; and that to have appeared religious would have been equivalent to pleading guilty to old age.

With all this, there were and are a great many worse women than the Contessa Zenobia; and there were at Florence a great many worse-liked women. In fact, she was not unpopular. She was considerably laughed at behind her back, it is

true. But the society of Florence is, perhaps, the most tolerant in the world. It is tolerant of ridicule, as of other matters. And the Contessa Zenobia was more than tolerated. She liked herself better a good deal than anybody else in the world ; but in this, at least, she was guilty of no singularity. And after the requirements of that preference had been complied with, she was good natured and kindly. She wished to be, and to remain, and be considered, young and gay and perennially frolicsome ; and she was not only perfectly content that all the rest of the world should be so too, but was ready to do her part towards establishing and maintaining the pleasing position. She kept a good house, which it was pleasant to frequent ; she was connected with many of the oldest and noblest families in Florence ; she did, as it is called, a great deal for society ; she had plenty of money, and spent it, if not altogether well or wisely, yet liberally and open-handedly. In short, the Contessa Zenobia was universally admitted to be a desirable acquaintance ; and if the Marchese Florimond had shown any signs of an intention to resign a position the arduous duties of which were becoming almost too much for him, there would have been no lack of candidates for the succession.

It has been mentioned that the Contessa Zenobia Altamari had been left very early in life a childless widow. More than thirty years had elapsed

since the date of her widowhood. But, about twelve or thirteen years later, her husband's younger brother had also died, leaving a widow and an infant child. Between the wife of this brother and the Contessa Zenobia there had never been much of friendship or mutual liking. To say the truth, the estrangement had not been the fault of the elder brother's wife. The younger lady had been a Milanese, and, what was very rare in those days, a highly cultivated as well as a highly gifted woman. It would have been difficult to find or even imagine one more violently contrasted in all respects with the Contessa Zenobia ; and when her husband first brought her to Florence, it is not too much to say that she conceived a perfect horror of her brother-in-law's widow, and no little amount of prejudice against the Florentine world, which accorded her so large and easy a tolerance. All the advances Zenobia had made towards her had been most rigidly repulsed ; and very shortly the only point in which the existence of the elder lady touched that of the younger, was the exiling the latter in a great measure from a society in which she would have risked meeting the connexion so distasteful to her.

Under these circumstances, it is creditable to the Contessa Zenobia, that, when the widow of the younger of the Altamari brothers died, some six or seven years after her husband, she adopted her

orphan niece as readily, and welcomed her as kindly, and interested herself in her welfare as warmly, as if she and the little orphan's mother had been the dearest friends.

But she did all these kind things by her niece after her own fashion—as, indeed, how could she do them otherwise. And probably the most fortunate thing that could have happened for the little Stella Altamari under the circumstances, was that keeping her at home formed no part of the Contessa Zenobia's notions of the manner in which young ladies should be educated. The little Stella had accordingly been sent, when she was about ten years old, to be brought up at a convent in Pistoia, which had in those days a considerable reputation as a place of education. That was in 1841; and Stella was now in her eighteenth year.

## CHAPTER III.

## AT THE PALAZZO ALTAMARI.

ON the morning following the conversation between Giulio Malatesta and his friend Carlo Brancacci, the Marchese Florimond was away to the Palazzo Altamari at a somewhat earlier hour than usual. The consequence was, that Carlo missed the opportunity of presenting his friend to his uncle before the latter left the house as he had intended. The fact was, that there was a matter of more than usual importance to be considered in council that morning at the Palazzo Altamari, and the Marchese was on duty rather earlier than usual in consequence. The matter in hand was the return of Stella from Pistoia, which was expected to take place that day. Her education was understood to have been completed, and she was coming home for her first presentation to the world during the gaieties of the ensuing Carnival.

Now, this return was looked forward to as a matter of some importance, not only in the Palazzo Altamari, but in the Florentine world in general. For Stella Altamari was a great heiress. Her father and his elder brother had divided between them one of the finest properties in Tuscany. The elder brother had bequeathed his share of the estates absolutely to his widow. But the Contessa Zenobia, when she took upon herself the care of her orphan niece, had declared publicly that she was to be her heiress. So the great Altamari property was once again to be united in the person of Stella.

The Florentine world had also heard rumours of the marvellous beauty of the heiress; and it may easily be understood, therefore, that the rising of this new star was looked to with no small degree of interest by many of the old and young of either sex among the upper ten *hundred* of Florence.

There had been no little talk, moreover, among the members of the same circles about the manner in which the Contessa Zenobia was likely to acquit herself of the task of introducing her niece and heiress into the world, and managing the grand object of that introduction, her marriage and settlement in life. Of course there would be no lack of aspirants to the hand of a lady so dowered by Nature and Fortune. Nevertheless, there were many who professed to feel very serious misgivings as to a con-

nexion with the Contessa Zenobia, and to the probable result of her handiwork in the matter of bringing up an adopted daughter. The expectations of society in that respect were not very exacting in Florence; but yet it was very generally felt that the Contessa Zenobia was not exactly the person that a judicious father would select to stand in the place of mother to his child.

In short, Florence was prepared to expect the appearance of the *débutante* in a more critical mood than usual, and to look with an extraordinary degree of curiosity on the proceedings of "La Zenobia" in the matter of "bringing her out."

The Palazzo Altamari was at no very inconvenient distance from the Palazzo Brancacci. They were both in the Via Larga. The houses in that street are of all sizes. It contains some of the largest and some of the smallest palaces in Florence. The Palazzo Altamari was one of the former; and the Palazzo Brancacci, though a snug, well-built house, one of the latter. The Contessa Zenobia, unlike all save the wealthiest of the Tuscan nobles, inhabited, or at least kept in her own occupation, the entirety of her splendid mansion. The ground floor afforded accommodation for her horses, her carriages, her harness-rooms, her muniment-room, her wood-houses, her oil-cellars, &c. The first floor, or *piano nobile*, was almost exclusively occupied by the magnificent suite of

receiving-rooms. The last room of the suite, situated at the southern extremity of the façade, was fitted up as the state bedroom, as one may call it; and was occupied—not without much state—by the Contessa Zenobia, who specially affected the old French fashion of receiving her intimate friends in bed, and was in the habit of mystifying her Florentine acquaintance very considerably by talking often of her *roovelle*—as she chose to translate into Tuscan pronunciation the “ruelle,” so utterly unpronounceable by Italian organs. The obscurity of her meaning was increased, moreover, by a figurative use of the wicked old French word wholly her own. Misconceiving it to signify, not the place but the act of receiving friends, she would insist that any one to whom she particularly wished to show distinguished favour should come to “*toutes mes soirées et toutes mes roovellées*.”

The *roovelle* of the Contessa Zenobia had, however, become a known and recognised, though in some degree mysterious, institution in Florence by the time now in question.

On the *piano nobile* also, behind the grand suite of rooms on the front, were the sleeping quarters of the Contessa’s tire-women, her dressing-room, bath-room, &c., all on the southern side of the great central hall; and the grand dining-room, and various offices connected with it, on the northern side of the same. All the remaining

sleeping-chambers were on the second floor, together with a small set of sitting-rooms, with their own little kitchen attached to them, in which the Contessa mainly lived when she was not engaged in "doing anything for society." The handsome drawing-rooms only of the suite on the *piano nobile* were used during the whole year, with the exception of the short autumnal *villegiatura*. The remainder of the state rooms were opened only during Carnival. And the great dining-room was never used at all, save on the one day of each year when the Contessa gave her annual grand dress-ball ; when it was opened for a supper-room.

It was to the small morning-room on the second floor that the Marchese Florimond made his way on the morning in question. No *roovelle* had been held that morning ; and the laced cap (supposed to be the working nightcap) and the other appurtenances of the *roovelle* toilette had been dispensed with. And Zenobia appeared before the well-accustomed eyes of the faithful Florimond *simplex mun*—that is not altogether the phrase required, either. Perhaps it would be better to say simply, without any attempt at quotation, in her dressing-wrapper, and without her "front."

"Good day, *caro mio !*" said the lady ; "upon my word, I began to think I was not going to see you this morning."

"Nay, *carissima Contessa*," replied the devoted

Florimond, "let us be just ! let us, before all things, be just. Beppo was coming up the stairs on his return from market as I left the palace. 'Beppo,' I said, 'what is the time—but the exact time by the clock in the Piazza?' 'Excellenza, it struck nine,' said he, 'as I was bargaining with the fruit-dealer at the *Canto alle Macine* ;'\* so you see, cara, that it cannot be more than twenty minutes past nine now. My watch says only nine and five minutes."

"Oh ! for Heaven's sake spare me your caligraphy ! If there is one thing I abominate more than another, it is a man that is caligraphical," cried the Contessa, who rarely uttered many consecutive sentences without adorning the diction with some flowers especially her own. "Besides," she continued, "I must tell you that I am in a very special bad humour this morning. I have been thinking of this matter of Stella all night. Bacchus has not once visited my eyes!"

"What is the doubtful point that has perplexed your mind ?" asked the Marchese, with an intensity of interest in his manner ; "though," he added, "it is of small use consulting me, if your own intelligence has failed to solve the difficulty."

"Why ! this it is. Where shall Stella make her

\* A spot so called not far from the fruit-market. Many parts of Florence are similarly called this or that "corner," which is the meaning of "Canto."

first appearance? On the winter walk at the Cascine, at the opera, or in the *salone*, here, in the evening? Madame Delile has sent home her dresses—lovely, both morning and evening—toilette and demi-toilette. What do you say to it, Marchese?"

The Marchese Florimond rose from his chair, and walked up and down the little sitting-room four or five times, grasping his forehead with one hand as he did so.

"It seems to me," he said at length, "that the Cascine walk would be best."

"Perhaps it would," agreed the lady. "But why do you think so?"

"Why!" said Florimond, biting his nails as he hesitated a minute; "it—comes first, you see!"

"Morbleu, that's true! '*Il n'y a que le vrai qui pique!*' as the divine Voltaire says. And the green walking dress that Madame Delile has sent is lovely. Only I wish they would not make the dresses so ridiculously long now-a-days. A pretty foot and well-turned ankle has no chance. Any way the ankle has not, and that's half the battle, eh, Marchese? So you are for the walk at the Cascine? What sort of weather is it?"

"A lovely day! Just the day for the winter walk. A touch of frost, but a sun like May, and not a breath of wind. All Florence will be there!"

"Then we will be there too! so that's settled. Ring the bell, Marchese!"

"But at what time is the Signorina Stella to arrive? Won't she be too tired to go out immediately?" said the Marchese, as he obeyed the behest of his liege lady.

"Stella will be here by mid-day; and we shall not go out till half-past three. Tired! A girl of eighteen, fresh from her convent, too tired to show herself to all the pretty fellows in Florence! Teach your grandmother to suck eggs, Marchese! Oh! Beppa," she continued, to a maid who had answered the bell, "tell Giovanni that I shall want the carriage at three—and, Beppa, desire Mademoiselle to come here."

Mademoiselle, it must be understood, was an elderly French woman, some ten years younger than the Contessa Zenobia. She had been, many years ago, that lady's personal maid, and in that capacity had acquired a complete knowledge of her mistress and all her ways and works, as well as a very considerable influence over her. Being well aware of this, and considering the position and mode of life of the Contessa, all alone in her great palace, it had struck her that it would not be difficult to mount a step in the social scale, and make for herself a permanent and comfortable home in the Palazzo Altamari on a somewhat better footing than that of a lady's-maid. So, she one day told her mistress that great as was her attachment to her, her attachment to *la belle France* was yet

more irresistible ;—that *la patrie* had the first claim on her heart ;—and, in short, that she must leave her. The Contessa was in despair ! So, after a little well-managed haggling, it was arranged, to the great mutual satisfaction of both parties, that Mademoiselle Zélie Dumont was to remain at the Palazzo Altamari in the capacity of humble friend and companion.

The habits and ideas of Italian society tend more than those of any other part of Europe to create in the families of the wealthy a numerous class of dependents, occupying every shade of gradation between a common servant and a bosom friend—and this in both sexes. And there appears to be something in the character or habitudes of the people, which prevents any of that annoyance or unpleasantness arising from an ill-defined position or a humiliating sense of dependence, which is so apt to spring from similar relationships among ourselves. It is almost needless to observe, that both good qualities and bad qualities are involved in this difference ; and that the investigation of these might lead to a chapter on national characteristics, if one were not warned from it by the remembrance that it is, perhaps, possible the reader may not want such a disquisition just at present.

At all events, the system had worked satisfactorily enough in the case of the Contessa Zenobia and Mademoiselle Zélie. The latter was

quite her mistress's equal in point of instruction and attainments, and her superior in common sense and discretion. She had assumed her silk gowns and her place in the drawing-room with equal ease and propriety ; nor had her appearance there and in her patroness's carriage caused the slightest embarrassment, or displeasure, or questioning on the part of any of those who were in the habit of meeting and seeing her in those situations. She became at once "La Zélie" to all the *habitués* of the house, and was thenceforward as much a component part of the establishment as the Contessa herself, or her pet lapdog, or her favourite cavaliere the Marchese Florimond.

With the return of Stella from her convent, however, a new and more arduous sphere of duty opened itself before La Zélie. It was quite in accordance with the notions of the Contessa Zenobia that a *duenna*, nominally and *ex officio* such, should form a main object in the proper surroundings of a *débutante* heiress. And who so adapted for the delicate and confidential position as La Zélie ? So it was perfectly understood in the Palazzo Altamari that the ancient tire-woman was to assume that responsible position. And it was, perhaps, fortunate for Stella that the "guide, philosopher, and friend" thus provided for her was incapacitated for the position thus assigned her by no worse defects than extreme ignorance and sil-

liness. La Zélie had no harm in her. She was really attached to her patroness, and was minded to do her duty in the new position assigned to her according to her notions and lights. She conceived that the natural wickedness of the human heart, in the case of young ladies in their teens, mainly showed itself in a strong propensity to read Paul de Koch's novels. And she determined to secrete all the volumes she possessed of them in a manner that should effectually preserve Stella from the temptation. She made no doubt that she should be assailed by various offers of "purses of gold pieces," as bribes to permit the entrance of too enterprising lovers at the window of her young lady's bed-chamber; and she was not only fully purposed to refuse all such propositions, but was steadfastly determined altogether to set her face against the too common practice of keeping lovers shut up in clothes-presses.

For the rest, La Zélie was an alert, well-preserved little woman of five-and-forty, with a small, red, dried-apple sort of looking face, a bright eye, a *nez retroussé*, and a neat figure, always specially well fitted, on which any word of compliment was always extremely acceptable to her.

"Zélie," said the Contessa, as the little woman entered the room in obedience to her summons, "the Marchese thinks we had better begin with the walk. His judgment may always be depended upon!"

The Marchese Florimond rose from his chair, and bowed severally to both ladies.

“ Assuredly it may, Madame la Comtesse ! The Marchese knows very well that daylight gives an advantage to colours in all their freshness that we ought not to neglect. There are plenty of beautiful faces to which sunlight is no longer a friend ; *n'est ce pas, Monsieur le Marquis ?*”

So the important question of the morning having been thus settled, the Marchese, after a few more words, which he had probably said in exactly the same sequence a hundred times before, took his leave, without saying a word about meeting again ; for it was quite a matter of course that he would be found sunning himself on the winter walk on the bank of the Arno between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

About an hour afterwards Stella arrived, under the convoy of two sisters of the convent at Pistoia, whom business connected with the educational department of their house had brought to Florence.

She came bounding up the great staircase of the *palazzo*, leaving the nuns and the old servant who had received her at the door to follow at their leisure.

“ Here I am, Aunt Zenobia !” she cried, throwing herself with such an impetus into the Contessa’s arms as to make the little lady stagger on her high-heeled boots ; “ here I am ! And I am so

glad to be here ! We have been such a time on the road ! How d'ye do, Zélie ? Is everybody well ? ”

“ Quite well, dear girl, if you don't knock us all over ! ” said the Contessa, recovering herself. “ You come into the room like a battering-ram—at least, I suppose battering-rams would come in in that way, would they not, Zélie ? ”

“ Just exactly like that, Signora Contessa ; they always do ! ” said Zélie.

“ Well ! I won't be a battering-ram, aunt,” said Stella.

“ Come here, child, and let me see if you have grown at all. No ! I don't see that you have,” she continued, measuring the girl against herself. “ You were just a finger's breadth taller than me in the summer, and you are exactly the same now. I am so glad you have not grown taller. I was afraid that you were going to be a gawky giantess ! ”

“ But you see I have taken example by you, aunt, and thought better of it,” said Stella ; who was, in truth, a most perfect specimen of the style of figure generally designated as fairy-like.

“ Yes ! I am pleased with your figure ! ” returned the Contessa ; “ it is, perhaps, a trifle, a shade too tall,” she added, looking at her niece critically.

“ It is just exactly a finger's breadth too tall, aunt,” said Stella, with a laugh in her eye.

"I think it is about that!" returned Zenobia, nodding gravely. "Let me see your feet."

"Oh! they'll do to carry me," said Stella, as she put forth one tiny little foot beyond the shelter of her dress.

"Do to carry you! as if that was what they were needed for!" cried the aunt. "Take care! I want to see what they are like," she added, seizing hold of Stella's dress as she spoke, and lifting it above her ankles.

"Nonsense! Don't, aunt! I don't like to be examined like a horse or a dog!" said Stella, escaping from her aunt's hand, while a slight blush crossed her face.

"But all these matters are necessary to be thought of," insisted her aunt; "and as people *will* wear such absurdly long dresses, I must teach you how to find opportunities for letting your foot be seen."

"Oh! nonsense, aunt! How can you talk in such a way? I am sure I won't be taught any such thing!"

"Why not, child? You have a very neat foot. Why not use the advantages God has given you? I know the value of a pretty foot!"

"Well, at all events, aunt, you won't have the cruelty to make me show mine when you are by. That would be too damaging to me, you know!"

"All the world cannot have such an instep as

that, it is true!" said Zenobia, stretching out a somewhat scraggy ankle, and lifting her dress to allow a view of it; "but you have a pretty foot, and it is your duty to society to let it be seen. We are going to walk in the Cascine this afternoon, and all Florence will be there."

"Must I go with you to-day, aunt?"

"Why, what a question! Of course you must! What am I going there for? And what have you come home for the Carnival for? And what is that beautiful walking dress from Delile's for? I mean you to have a regular jolly Carnival—balls, operas, masquerades, assemblies, and fun of all sorts."

"And I am ready for as much of it as ever you will give me, dear aunt. I'll dance right up to Ash-Wednesday morning with all my heart. But there is something else I wanted to do to-day."

"Something else? Why, what can you have to do in Florence, Stella?"

"Oh! nothing that need be done to-day. Only to see the friend of a friend of mine, an old Signora Palmieri. Clara Palmieri was my great friend at the convent. And she wished me to call on her mother, here in Florence."

"Another day you shall do so; but we cannot miss to-day at the Cascine. So now go and dress yourself. Zélie will go with you."

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE WINTER WALK AT THE CASCINE.

THE winter walk in the Cascine was more than usually crowded that day ; and it is probable that the beauty of the weather was not the only attraction which drew the crowd thither. For the Marchese Florimond, on leaving the Palazzo Altamari, had proceeded to perform the second great duty of his day. This was to exhibit himself for an hour or so in front of the Café Doney, a spot which is to Florence a concentrated essence, as it were, of Pall Mall and the Boulevard des Italiens. There the Marchese Florimond was unfailingly to be seen amid a knot of his peers, gathering, with the industry of the busy bee, the gossip of the day, and supremely happy if chance put it in his power to make any original contribution to the general stock.

The Marchese Florimond was a great man that day on the gossip exchange. It was great and important news he had to tell, and on a subject on which it was well known that he was unexceptionable authority. The Contessa Stella Altamari was to arrive in Florence in an hour or so, and would infallibly be on the winter walk in the Cascine that afternoon. Within an hour after the appearance of the Marchese on 'Change, the fact was known to all the *crème de la crème* of Florence. It was no wonder, therefore, that there was a full muster on the banks of the Arno.

Few European cities possess a mall of equal beauty with that winter walk in the Cascine, none any place of resort surpassing it. It has, within the last two or three years, been additionally improved and embellished. A new quarter of the city has arisen on the bank of the river, built on the space which formerly existed between the town wall and the entrance to the half garden-like, half park-like grounds of the Cascine. A handsome new city gate has been erected. The famous winter walk has been a little prolonged towards this new entrance, so that the promenader may now step from the broad sunny pavement of the Lung' Arno, as the street is called, which runs along the river bank through the entire city, at once on to the walk, which follows the bank of the stream for two miles or more from the gate.

These are new magnificences, which testify unmistakably to the rising fortunes and prosperity of the City of Flowers, under the stimulus of the new order of things in Italy. But the walk as it existed at the time in question had abundantly sufficient charm and beauty to make for itself a special place in the memory of any of those who have enjoyed its luxurious shelter.

As a winter walk it is surely matchless. It runs along the north bank of the river, and is shut in by a lofty, close, and well-kept evergreen hedge, and by the thick Cascine woods behind it. As the walker advances, when leaving the city behind him, he has the storied stream glancing in the sunshine and playing among its rapids and shallows on his left hand, the richly tinted woods with their fine ilex and evergreen and winter-liveried oak and beech on his right, and the craggy serrated outline of the snowy Apennines in the neighbourhood of Carrara in the distance in front of him. As he returns towards the city the view is a yet richer and choicer one. In that direction the prospect is mainly shut in by the near hill of St. Miniato, rising immediately on the other side of the city, with its ancient church on its summit, and its ivy-grown fragments of the huge walls erected by Michael Angiolo at the time of the siege of Florence;—mainly, but not entirely, for on that side also there are glimpses of snow-capped tops, the

summits of the Chianti hills, in the distance. But the special and unrivalled beauty of the landscape in this direction is due to the city itself ; many of the most striking buildings of which group themselves into pictures seen through circling frames of ilex-trees, the magnificent growth of many a generation, with an effect not easily forgotten by any eye capable of appreciating landscape beauty.

On this delightful promenade, sunning itself in the full southern sun, and safely protected from every cold blast from the Apennine by the woods and the tall hedge which bounds them, the Florentine world loves to congregate of a winter afternoon. The Cascine have plenty of shady avenues and bowery meadows for summer evening walks ; but the long mall on the bank of the Arno is the walk for winter. It is not the fashion for the female portion of the Florentine *beau monde* to repair to the Cascine on foot, close as the walk is to the city wall. The mode is to leave one's carriage in the drive adjoining the winter walk, so as to avoid all exposure to the wintry winds, which are careering over less privileged localities.

Carlo Brancacci had taken his friend Giulio to breakfast at Doney's, partly for the sake of introducing him to one of the principal lounges of the city, and partly for the purpose of taking that opportunity of presenting him to his uncle ; for though they had all three passed the night under

the same roof, it rarely happened that the Marchese and his nephew saw each other before they both left the house on their different errands in the morning.

The presentation had duly taken place ; and the courteous little Marchese had received Giulio with the utmost cordiality, trusting that he would pass a gay and agreeable Carnival, rejoicing that his house should be made useful to his nephew's friend, and telling him that none of the name of Brancacci could ever forget the noble action which had for ever made them his debtors. For the Marchese Florimond was a gentleman, notwithstanding his little ridicules. He was devotedly attached to his nephew, and felt proportionably the gratitude he owed to the preserver of his life ;—an act which had, as Carlo Brancacci said with perfect truth, been performed at the greatest risk to his own. So the few cordial words which the little Marchese had spoken, and, more still, his manner in speaking them, had soothed the somewhat bristling susceptibility of Malatesta's pride, and made him feel that he could accept the hospitality offered to him without any further protest or misgiving.

“ And now,” said Carlo, after spending the intervening time in a first visit to some of the objects of most prominent interest in the city—“ now it is time to go to the Cascine. You will see all the pretty women in Florence there, and, above all, the

new arrival—the beauty, the heiress, the cynosure of all eyes."

"All that is very well for you, Carlo *mio!* but what have I to do with beauties and heiresses? Better leave me alone in the shade here, while you go bask!"

"Now, Giulio! that's not fair! I won't have Lenten talk and Lenten thoughts in Carnival. It's contrary to all religion! As for heiresses, I should have thought that you were exactly the man who *had* to do with them, seeing that you have nothing of your own."

"I am afraid your philosophy wont suit my case, Carlo. Every man must make his own for his own use."

"He had better make it fresh and fresh, then, and not keep it by him till it turns sour. Now my philosophy teaches me to be particularly content with what fortune has provided for me, and consequently for you too, to-day. There will not be a man at the Cascine who will not be dying for an introduction to the new beauty. For you and me it is already provided; and in all probability not another fellow in all Florence will get speech of her till the evening. We shall have a good half-dozen hours' start of all the field. Do you call that nothing?"

"You don't mean to attempt introducing *me* to this paragon of rank, beauty, wealth, and fashion,

there in the face of all the gay world of Florence ? You can't dream of such a thing!"

"I mean to be presented myself!—that you may depend on. I should think I did, indeed ! And you will be by my side. We are inseparables ! *Cela s'entend !* But every care shall be taken of your retiring sensitiveness. There is the hedge and the wood at hand. If the radiancy of the little beauty's eyes is more than you can stand, and the scene altogether too much for your nerves, you have only to jump through the hedge, and find yourself in the congenial gloom of the wood!"

"I think I shall adopt that plan at first, and take my natural place on the shady side of the hedge, while you walk in the sunshine."

"We shall see ! But, for my own part, I have taken care to have the first chance. I have said a word in my uncle's ear ! Let him alone to manage a matter of that sort. He has told me exactly the place where they will leave the carriage. He will give the Contessa's coachman his orders accordingly. And of course he will be in waiting there himself, as in duty bound. Then we happen to stroll up, and we—that is, I am presented, and you jump bolt into the hedge. I take my place by the Signorina's side during the walk, stick to her as close as wax, and don't let another fellow come near her. Besides, the prince of all uncles, past and present, has promised me that nobody else shall be presented

during the walk. If that is not strategy, I should like to know what is!"

"But, Carlo, seriously, have you any object in this scheme for monopolising the Contessina, pouncing on her like a hawk the instant she ventures out of the dove-cote?"

"Monopolise her! why, you monster of ingratitude, am I not proposing to go shares with you, with a loyalty of friendship worthy of a Bayard?"

"But now, seriously, Carlo—if it is possible for you ever to be serious?"

"Seriously, then, you very serious greybeard my far-seeing mind has projected itself into the darkness of the future up to about five o'clock this afternoon, when we shall be returning from our walk. Beyond that, all is deepest night and void chaos! Though I fain would discern a vision of dinner dimly rising out of the abyss beyond."

"I say, Carlo, I wonder whether it feels very delightful to have such a mind and heart as yours? Do you feel as if you were always drunk, or how?" said Giulio, after they had walked some time in silence.

"Try it, old fellow!" replied Carlo. "Make it Carnival-time in your heart for once and a way, and see if you are not all the better for it!"

"Ah! that is so easily said!" returned Giulio, with a sigh.

"Now, here is the place where the Contessa's

carriage will draw up," said Carlo, stopping in his walk. "That is the Grand-Duke's dairy farm,"\* pointing as he spoke to a handsome building standing back from the river some half a furlong. "Just here about is always the most crowded part of the walk. My uncle will be here in a few minutes, no doubt. But I don't want to be with him when they come up. We will let him hand the ladies from the carriage, and then come up directly afterwards. Then he will walk with the Contessa, and the Contessina and Zélie will walk behind them."

"And who is Zélie?"

"Oh! every one in Florence knows La Zélie; she is a sort of *gouvernante*. Zélie and I are great friends, which will make our enterprise all the easier."

"Your enterprise!"

"I beg pardon! *my* enterprise. There is a gap in the hedge just there for you to escape through."

Chattering in this manner, Carlo drew his friend a little farther down the sunny walk, which was now rapidly filling with people. Carriage after carriage drew up by the side of the broad gravel promenade and discharged its occupants amid the well-dressed crowd. Carlo's object was to hover near enough to spy the Altamari carriage on its

\* *Cascine*, in the plural, means grazing-meadows for dairy purposes.

arrival, so as to meet the ladies apparently by chance, as soon as might be after they had alighted.

They had not very long to wait before Carlo descried the well-known pair of handsome greys, the olive-green open carriage, with its buff-coloured lining, and the head and superb head-dress of the Contessa Zenobia, emerging from beneath an immense fur rug, so arranged as to cover the whole of her almost recumbent person. It was very inconvenient to the short legs of the little Contessa to maintain herself in this attitude, and her head and shoulders almost went down on the cushions of the seat of the carriage in the effort. But fashion prescribed that position, and the Contessa Zenobia would have broken her neck in the attempt, rather than not accomplish it. By her side sat Stella, looking tall by contrast with the reclining figure of her aunt. Zenobia had endeavoured to make Stella lie down in the prescribed position, but she had been rebellious in that respect, declaring that her legs were not long enough, and that she should slip off the seat altogether if she attempted it. In the back of the carriage sat La Zélie.

The Marchese Brancacci, who had also been on the watch, but nearer at hand, and desiring rather than objecting to be seen evidently there for the purpose of meeting them, hustled up to the carriage, raising his hat high above his head as he did so, and proceeded to hand the ladies out.

That was the moment Carlo had been waiting for; but he judged it expedient to practise a little deception on his friend, whom he knew well enough to be afraid that he really might adopt the mode of escape which had been suggested to him.

"Very odd they don't come!" said he; "let us turn back a little way towards the town, and try if we can see anything of them. I shall know the carriage at a distance."

So Giulio was led unsuspectingly up to the cannon's mouth. All of a sudden he found himself face to face with the Marchese Brancacci, and, as it struck him, the most singular little figure he had ever seen. It has been said that the Contessa Zenobia's head was somewhat too large for her body; but the defect was rendered infinitely more striking by the adoption of head-gear far too large for the head. The gravel walk was as dry and as clean as sun and sweeping could make it; but none the less did the Contessa hold her gorgeously-coloured draperies high enough to display the whole of her dapper high-heeled little boots, on the points of which she danced and dangled herself along in a rickety and wire-hung sort of style, that was truly wonderful to see. No eyes, however, save those of a few recently-arrived foreigners, seemed to be attracted to the strange exhibition either by curiosity or surprise. "*La Zenobia*" was too well known in Florence.

Before he could recover from his surprise at so queer a figure, Giulio heard the Marchese Florimond saying :

“ Permit me, Signora Contessa, to present to you my highly valued friend Signor Giulio Malatesta. Signor Giulio, the Contessa Zenobia Altamari ! ”

Giulio had of course to make his bow in due form ; and then to listen to an inquiry whether this was his first visit to Florence, and an invitation to spend his *prima sera*\* at the Palazzo Altamari whenever he should have no better mode of disposing of it. But while his ears were thus engaged, his eyes and mind were exclusively, and quite in spite of any conscious will or purpose of his own, occupied with what appeared to him to be the most perfect specimen of female beauty, both of face and figure, it had ever been his lot to see.

Stella Altamari was beautiful, exceedingly beautiful, undoubtedly. But many a face and form, which had passed beneath Giulio’s eye without exciting in him more than a tribute of passing approbation, would have been deemed by many another man more attractive than those of Stella. What is the law which regulates the phenomena of these apparently capricious elective affinities ? It is assuredly not that of like seeking

\* The early part of the evening, before going to a ball or other large party.

like. Is not the rule, for the most part, so contradictory to any such principle, as to make it seem more probable that in these matters a deficiency is seeking its complement---a need its satisfaction?

In the case of Stella Altamari and Giulio Malatesta, the most careless bystander or the closest observer would have equally said, that it was impossible to find a more strongly-marked contrast between any two faces, figures, temperaments, and tones of mind. Malatesta's face was undeniably handsome, though many persons might have been rather repelled than attracted by the air of habitual melancholy, not unmixed with a certain haughty reserve, which characterised the expression of his features. His cheek was almost colourless, but the clear whiteness of it, which had none of the sallowness of ill health, and, yet more, the still greater fairness of the lofty and well-formed forehead, marked very visibly at the temples by blue veins, contrasted strikingly with the heavy curls of his perfectly black hair. The outline of the Grecian nose was delicate; and together with the pointed chin, and the extreme sweetness and gentleness which mainly characterised the mouth, might have imparted an appearance of too much weakness to the face, had the expression thus produced not been corrected by the frank boldness and determination of the large and well-opened eyes. These eyes constituted, probably, the great fascination of

the face. They were of the deepest shade of blue ; and though habitually more than calm, inclined, even, to that dreamy look which often indicates a tendency to turn the gaze to the world within rather than to the world without—a subjective rather than an objective nature—there were thoughts and feelings that could make the latent fire in them flash forth,—moments when the light in them served less to gather impressions from without than to manifest the wealth of passion, noble sentiment, and lofty aspiration, which constituted the inmost core of the man's nature. And then his whole aspect and bearing changed from that of melancholy reverie to one of energy, decision, and high-strung volition, which had in it a veritable imprint of the heroic.

Adversity is usually said to be a useful and wholesome discipline. It is so to some idiosyncrasies —to the greater number, perhaps. But there are others to which it is not such. Nor are all these latter those merely weak and shallow natures for which the hard schooling is too strong, which lack stamina to recover their vital warmth after the cold-water dash of misfortune. They are not exclusively such who are damaged rather than improved by adversity. There are natures, the good qualities of which are indurated into mischievous ones by adversity ; in which self-reliance is concentrated into anti-social self-isolation ; an honest and ennobling pride intensified into a sore sensitiveness shrinking

from the most friendly touch ; and independence of feeling irritated into morose retirement from the sympathies of humanity.

Carlo Brancacci was too diametrically opposed to all this in his own temperament, too mercurial, too jovial, too thoughtless, too happy, to note or understand his friend's inner nature. But a more shrewd observer would have said that Malatesta's life and position had not been healthy ones for the development of his special character ; and that some opportunity for energetic action, or the electric shock of some powerful passion of the class of those which crave and depend on sympathy with some other soul, would furnish the most desirable means for straightening the warp in his mental growth which the circumstances of his social position had occasioned.

And this was the man who, when his glance fell casually on that brilliant little butterfly glancing in the sun there, behind the lady to whom he was gravely bowing, felt instantly, suddenly, unwillingly, much as Adam may be supposed to have felt when his eye first rested on Eve ;—felt as if he now saw and felt the presence of a woman for the first time in his life ;—as if she, that incarnation of joyous youth and thoughtlessness, were not only the only woman in the world, but the only object worthy of thought or interest !

It surely was passing strange !

Was there anything in the little beauty to account for the phenomenon?—anything that one might be able to discover by looking at her, and reason on, that is to say; for that there *was* some cause, and some good cause, for the effect produced we may be very sure, however subtly latent in depths beyond our ken.

There could be no doubt about it that the little creature was extremely pretty, nay, exceedingly beautiful. No eye could make any mistake about that. But Giulio had seen many as lovely a face and form before. Was it the brimming, overflowing life and happiness that mantled in her dimpled cheek and laughed in her shyly glancing eye? One would not have supposed beforehand that *that* was the type of character to recommend itself to the shy, grave man, whose habitual mental attitude towards joyousness and mirth was that of shrinking from a strange presence with which he had no concern.

Something else there must have been;—something besides dimpled cheeks, though the most delicate tint of the blush-rose was on them; besides cherry lips, though their smiles wreathed them into varied prettiness, changing with each passing thought; something more than a sylph-like form, though only Ariel's own could have rivalled it in its combination of slender delicacy with springy elasticity. And, perhaps, this some-

thing was to be found in Stella's face, as in Giulio's, in the eyes. There are laughing eyes, bright and bead-like, which can only glitter and sparkle, the laughter of which seems only to be surface deep. Stella's eyes were not of this kind. Again, there are laughing eyes, brilliant and eloquent—often wicked in their eloquence, which light up with the flashes of wit, and speak from intellect to intellect. But neither were Stella's eyes of these. They belonged to the category of those whose laughter speaks not only from intellect to intellect, but from heart to heart; which are carriers, not only of the sharp messages of wit, but also of the larger intercourse and more varied intercommunications of humour; which can mirror back in sympathy, not one only, but every phase and mood of feeling;—laughing eyes, from which the tears are not far distant; changeful eyes, mobile as the sunshine of an April day. I think that the special charm of that girlish face must have lain in the depths of those profound eyes, which had the promise in them of so much beyond the transient expression of the moment.

Giulio had time to receive a revelation of his future destiny like a lightning flash, but not to render any account to himself of the import and results involved therein, while the Contessa Zenobia was making her little civil speech and giving her invitation. And then she and the Marchese Flo-

rimond paired off, and he was standing face to face with the Hebe-like little creature who had so fascinated him. Carlo had been presented to her by his uncle while the Contessa was speaking to Giulio, and was already in full talk with her and La Zélie. He had taken his place between the two ladies, so that Stella's other side was unoccupied ; and when, as the Contessa and the Marchese moved on, leaving him on that side of the path, Carlo introduced him to Zélie and her charge as the best and most valued friend he had in the world, it was impossible to avoid placing himself by her side as they all continued their walk together.

Never did the Contessa Zenobia receive so many ostentatiously cordial greetings as she did that day ; but they did not succeed in their aim, for the Marchese Florimond, true to his promise to his nephew, managed so that no opportunity arose for giving any one of the aspirants an excuse for joining the party. Everybody on the walk was soon talking of the beauty of the *débutante*, and many an inquiry was made as to who the handsome but glum-looking fellow by her side could be.

And Giulio did not jump into any of the gaps in the hedge as he passed them in his walk, though he had a strong feeling all the time that to do so would be the wisest course he could pursue. There was the shelter of the thick dark wood at hand ! What business had *he* basking in that sunshine,

and drinking in the while sparkling draughts of a poison that he felt was mortal to him?

Yet Stella was very innocent of any intention of presenting any such fatal chalice to his lips. If she had, on returning from the Cascine, answered the entire and simple truth to the question whether she had enjoyed her walk, she would have said No! And if further asked, Why not? she would have been puzzled to reply. She would have said, probably, in her own language, that she felt a certain "*soggezione*"\* in the presence of that new acquaintance who had joined them in their walk. She had been oppressed by an unusual sense of shyness. She would have declared that the stranger had by no means struck her as a particularly agreeable person—rather the reverse. Yet during the walk she had paid marked attention to every word he had said, far more than to the more lively companion on the other side of her. But then Carlo Brancacci, though it was some years since they had seen each other, was an old acquaintance; and she had, perhaps, felt that courtesy required her to stand more on ceremony with the stranger. No! it never occurred to her to think that this remarkable looking Signor Malatesta was agreeable. Yet, somehow or other, it was to him, and to the words he had spoken, that her thoughts reverted as

\* Literally, "subjection." The word is used to signify the sense of not being entirely at one's ease in the presence of another.

soon as she was alone, after her return from the Cascine.

Yet very little had passed during the walk—especially very little directly between her and Malatesta—of any interest. Carlo had related at length the whole story of the memorable exploit at Gombo, omitting no circumstance that could contribute to place the self-devotion and courage of his friend in the strongest possible light. And Giulio, who had many times listened to Carlo's repetition of the story with real impatience and annoyance, was not angry with him for telling it on this occasion, though he was sufficiently ill at ease the while to be totally unobservant of the glances, expressive of curiosity, perhaps, rather than admiration, but of interest certainly, which Stella ventured to steal at his face from under her long eyelashes, while the story was telling.

Then Carlo had gone on to tell how there never was such a fellow as Malatesta;—how there was nothing particularly complimentary in having one's life saved by him, inasmuch as he was quite ready to risk his own in anybody's service who might chance to need it;—how little Enrico Palmieri, who was the youngest of all the students in the University at Pisa, only fifteen, quite a child, you know, Signora Stella, had got into trouble in the forest of the Cascine,\* at Pisa, with one of the

\* The Cascine near Pisa, towards the sea-coast, is a very dif-

half-wild breed of buffaloes there ;—how the other fellows who were with him ran away when the enraged brute charged them, and little Palmieri stumbled and fell ;—and how it would doubtless have gone hard with him, had it not chanced that Malatesta, who was rambling about in the forest in his queer solitary way, had come up just in time to save him ;—how he had faced the animal, and cowed it by his cool courage, &c. &c. &c. And this history had led to the discovery that the Enrico Palmieri, who had been thus saved, was the youngest brother of Teresa Palmieri, Stella's dear and special friend at the convent at Pistoia. And out of this, some little conversation had arisen between Stella and Giulio. But it was very little ; for though the circumstances were favourable enough in skilful hands to have been made the foundation of quite a friendship between them, Giulio had not known how, or had not chosen to improve them.

There was one other point at which the conversation had strayed to a topic, which had struck a still more strongly vibrating chord of sympathy between them. And that time there had been

ferent sort of place from the Florentine park and gardens bearing the same name. The word is applied at Pisa to an extensive tract of very wild country, partly pasture, partly swamp, and partly forest, lying along the coast between Pisa and Leghorn. It is there that the celebrated breed of camels, the only instance of their propagation in Europe, have existed for the last three centuries.

more of mutual consciousness that such was the case. Something had been said about projected fun and frolic for the winding up of the Carnival, in reply to which, Malatesta had said that he was not sure that any of them would be there at the end of the Carnival;—that it was very evident that the hour was near at hand, when the country would need their hands and arms for other purposes than Carnival revelry;—that a movement was on the eve of taking place which would call every man who deserved the name of an Italian to the frontiers. To all which Carlo had replied, in his light epicurean way, that fighting the Austrians was work for Lent, that Carnival-time was Carnival-time, and that it would be quite soon enough to think of going to the frontier on the other side of Ash-Wednesday.

“Nay, Carlo *mio!*” said Malatesta, while the eloquent blood rushed to his pale cheek, and his eyes flashed out with enthusiasm; “*this* is the Lenten-tide—the long dreary Lenten-tide, while the Austrian heel is still on our neck, and the time has not yet come for striking the blow for our final deliverance. That will be the true Carnival-time! Would that its dawn had come!”

And as he spoke Stella’s cheek flushed also, and her eye, too, flashed fire, and her delicate little pink nostril distended itself; and one rapid interchange of glances passed between her and Giulio, which was sufficient to prove to both of them, that at least

on one subject there was a strong bond of sympathy between them.

And for the moment the conviction that such was the case had sent a thrill of pleasure to Giulio's heart. But it was succeeded in the next instant by a bitter taking of himself to task for the folly of permitting himself to receive gratification from such a circumstance. And altogether, when the ladies had returned to their carriage—the Marchese Florimond having accepted the fourth seat in it for his return to the city—Carlo found his companion, as they walked homewards together, more taciturn, more sad, and more bitter in his strictures on men and things, than usual. Carlo tried with very little success to make him talk about Stella. He said, in reply to a question on the subject, shortly but emphatically, that she was very beautiful; and when Carlo, for the sake of drawing him out, had added, that beyond her prettiness she seemed to have nothing in her, he answered decisively, that the very little means of judging he had had, would, as far as they went, have led him to form a quite different opinion.

When the privacy of his own room gave him an opportunity for the reflection he stood in need of, his self-communings were longer and more bitter. What madness was this that had seized his heart and brain? What hopeless misery was he not preparing for himself? Fool that he had been to

come among the denizens of a world in which he had neither art norp art ! He, the outcast, the nobody, the branded one with the mark of the world's disgrace on him, to come out owl-like from his obscurity, and flutter, dazzled, round the brightest creature of the sunlight ! Would to Heaven that the call to arms, which must come soon, would sound to-morrow, and rouse him with its trumpet-note from the spell which had fallen upon him !

Had that call sounded, Malatesta would possibly have heard its summons gladly, and unquestionably would have obeyed it. But it is equally true that the Pisa diligence would, as far as saving him from the danger that appalled him went, have served the same purpose.—And he did not avail himself of its aid.

As for Stella, an impression of some sort, strong enough to make her feel a desire for speaking on the subject, had been made on her, too, by that walk in the Cascine. But her meditations and speculations on the matter had far less of self-knowledge in them.

Zélie was the only person whose aid she could seek in her attempts to obtain some insight into the nature of the impression that had been produced upon her. And Zélie proved to be disqualified by total lack of sympathy from giving any aid whatever in the difficulty. Malatesta might have been the most splendid match in all Italy for what Zélie

knew to the contrary. But if duennas were furnished *ex officio* with some sixth sense for the infallible detection of the approach of poverty, she could not have set her face more decidedly against him. She contrasted him in the most unfavourable manner with Carlo Brancacci; she declared that he looked as if he did not live upon wholesome food, but eat grass like the wicked king with the long name in the Bible; and she maintained that a great Newfoundland dog could and would have done all that he was said to have done in the way of heroic emprise.

The result of this was, that Stella, being thus driven to revise her impressions and question the accuracy of them, was led to the deliberate and matured opinion that nobody but a very noble fellow would have acted as he did at Gombo, and in the forest; and that he did not look at all as if he fed on grass—quite the contrary.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE PALMIERI FAMILY.

AND the Carnival-time went on in the usual way, the revel and the fun growing ever faster and more furious as the prescribed Shrove-tide limit was approached. For this is the theory and practice of Carnival-keeping. Of many other seasons, ceremonials, and solemnities, the high tide and culminating point is to be found in a central position. A gradual *crescendo* movement is followed by a proportionate *diminuendo*; thus substituting a gentle incline, as one may say, for an abrupt precipice in the passage of men's lives from one phase to another. But the reverse is the case in the transition from Carnival to Lent. There the precipice is studiously made as abrupt as possible. The *crescendo* movement, by which the top of it is reached, is gradual; becoming, however, more

rapid with every step of the advance. Then the plunge into that abyss, from the profundities of which *miserere* voices are supposed (what a convenient phrase that is!) to arise in penitence and wailing, is made in a spirit, and apparently on principles, analogous to those which prescribe the alternations of a Russian bath.

And in that memorable 1848, the Carnival in Florence proceeded in its due course as usual. Though unusual thoughts and words were mingled with the revelry; and some were of opinion that this was hardly a time in Italy for light-hearted fooleries; that Italian men should be busy with other pelting than that of *bonbons*; and many danced none the less blithely that they were ready and eagerly longing to be engaged in a rougher *mélée*; and some found the covert of the Carnival *domino* convenient for the saying of words, such as for many a long year in Italy had not come from beneath a silken mask. But these were the under-currents, not visible on, and scarcely affecting the surface. There all was as usual. As usual, those who had danced through twenty Carnivals noted some changes in the *dramatis personæ*, who were playing the old parts before the old painted scenes. Some who had hobbled on with desperate courage to the end of the mad whirl in 1847, could no more come to the scratch when time was up in 1848. What! no lights, no supper, no champagne in the old

Marchesa's opera-box this year! Could not paint, false hair, eyebrows, teeth, and gaiety, a cordial dram beforehand and spiritual consolation after, keep up the game for one year longer? So the poor old Marchesa has begun her long Lent at last! How! no ball in the Marli Palace this Carnival? What! have you not heard that the old Prince caught cold after the Corso on that bitter cold Sunday, and died three days afterwards? So the oldsters opine that Carnival is getting tame, and is not what it used to be! But the lovely Principessa Ranteroffski, whose Prince, some say, is passing his Carnival in Siberia, while others are ready to swear that, be that how it may, *La bella Ranteroffski* herself has passed through quite another phase of sublunary existence—if, indeed, that chaste planet shines on the Rue de Breda—the lovely Ranteroffski thinks that never was Carnival-tide so brilliant! And worthy dames, who danced their last Carnival out some dozen years ago, and now reappear on the scene with daughters eager for their turn, find that all is going on still much as it was in their day.

As to the Contessa Zenobia, she, we may be quite sure, will die in harness! If the day *should* ever come when there shall be no Carnival ball in the Altamari Palace, no supper in *La Zenobia's* box at the Opera Veglione,\* no more receptions in her

\* The masked balls at the Pergola and other theatres are so

drawing-room at night, and no more "roovelles" in the morning, then, indeed, it may be safely concluded that *La Zenobia* has gone to take her part in that eternal Carnival, which, we are assured, awaits the rich made perfect by sufficient mass-legacies.

One good thing at least there was to be said for poor Zenobia—one very good thing. Those who persist in sitting out successive tables full of feasters at the festive board, are apt to grudge the newly-arrived guests their places. This was not the case with Zenobia. She would sometimes, with a sublime unconsciousness and self-delusion, say a word or two in disparagement of those who would still keep their seats at the festal table, when he of the scythe and hour-glass had long since told them that it was time to depart. But she never grudged the young new comers their place or their full share of the feast. To do so would have seemed to her like taking part with the old folks against her own side of the house. So that Stella, under her Aunt Zenobia's auspices, was not like to find her first Carnival a slow one.

And Stella herself? Never, to say the truth, did butterfly emerge from its state of chrysalis obscurity into the sunshine of its summer existence more ready and eager for the light and the enjoyment, than did Stella from the pale monotonous life

called in Florence. The word means simply "a great watching at night;" "a great sitting up late."

of her convent. Operas, balls, masquerades, parades on the Corso, and sunny walks in the Cascine, all were welcome; no form of Carnival gaiety came amiss to her. She took her place at the table hungry and athirst for the promised pleasure feast.

But it may be doubted whether, at the very outset, the full capacity for enjoying all that was offered for her enjoyment had not been seriously damaged. For the due enjoyment of a first Carnival it is indispensable to be heart-whole. Now, Stella had not fallen in love with Giulio Malatesta at first sight, as the phrase is, as he had done, even to his own knowledge, with her. By no means so! But neither, after the date of that first walk in the Cascine, could she have been said to be "fancy-free."

It is a pretty, and at the same time an accurately descriptive word, that "fancy-free." It is certain that Stella was no longer fancy-free. At her aunt's evening receptions she would ask the Marchese Florimond whether they should see Signor Carlo that evening, the real matter of interest in the question being, whether they were likely to see his inseparable friend. At the opera her eye would go searching about among the crowd of black hats and bearded faces grouped just within the doors of the pit, in quest of a certain pale and sad-looking face, which had already established itself in her fancy as an object of more interest—curiosity,

Stella called it to herself—than any other. And before a week was over, no dance at the balls, to tell the honest truth, had any interest or flavour in it, save the one, or perhaps two, in the course of the evening danced with that same object of so much speculative curiosity. Malatesta would assuredly never have mustered courage to ask the beauty and the heiress to dance with him, had not Carlo Brancacci traitorously tricked him into doing so.

“ Oh, Signorina Stella !” said he, choosing his moment well, “ we have been looking for you everywhere, Giulio and I. I am going to dance a quadrille with Clara Vinci, and we want a *vis-à-vis* of our own set. Malatesta is trying to find you to ask you to dance with him. I’ll be his proxy, for fear somebody should snap you up before he finds you. Are you engaged ? ”

“ No ! Signor Carlo—but——”

“ You’ll hold yourself provisionally engaged till he can get the chance of asking you. Thanks ! I don’t want to have some English girl for a *vis-à-vis* that I cannot speak to ! ”

Then calling to Giulio, who, as he knew very well, was mooning disconsolately enough in a neighbouring doorway, he said : “ Oh ! Giulio, you are to be *vis-à-vis* to Clara Vinci and me ! La Signorina Stella has promised to dance the set with you ; so you have only to express your gratitude, if

it is not, as I should suppose, beyond all expression, and come along."

Of course Giulio, with his cheek on fire, and his heart bounding as if it must choke him, had nothing for it but to mutter some *banalité* about Carlo being quite right in saying that his gratitude was greater than he could express, and take the goods the gods provided him. He thought that he could feel—(or was it merely fancy ? He meditated the point again and again in the course of the night afterwards, but could not attain to any safe conviction on the subject)—but he certainly did think that he felt that tiny hand tremble a little as it rested on his arm. And if it did ? What then ? It was nothing, but that she shivered with some draught of air probably ! Only that he perfectly well remembered that a minute before he had remarked how hot the rooms were.

However, that quadrille was not the last dance that Giulio and Stella danced together that night ; and as I have said, before the end of the week, *the* dance or dances of the night for Stella were those danced with him.

As may be easily supposed, all this did not take place before the eyes of all Florence without more than one kind friend having felt it to be their duty to discover who and what the stranger was who was very evidently finding favour in the eyes of the little lady, the observed of all observers ; and,

having discovered it, to convey a word of caution on the subject to the Contessa Zenobia. But Zenobia utterly scouted the notion that the amusements of the ball-room could exercise any influence over the prosaic and altogether business-like affair of marriage. Malatesta, she declared, was a very pretty fellow; and she thought that her niece showed great tact and discretion in diverting herself with one who was in a position to make all thought of any serious interest between them out of the question.

It was about a week after her arrival in Florence, on the morning after one of the balls, at which she had been using *à discréteion* the licence thus allowed her, that Stella found an opportunity of making the visit she had spoken of to her aunt on the day of her coming. It was difficult amid all the occupations of the Carnival to find an hour for the purpose; and if Stella had not perseveringly insisted on it, the visit to her convent friend's mother would never have been made. But the fact was, that Stella, since that first walk in the Cascine, had become greatly more interested in the old lady and in the promised visit than she had been before. She knew from her friend Clara Palmieri that her brother Enrico, the boy whom Malatesta had saved from being gored by the buffalo in the Cascine at Pisa, was to spend the Carnival holiday with his mother, and she promised herself to get

from him the whole history of the adventure, with all its details.

Carolina Palmieri, the mother of Clara Palmieri, Stella's convent friend, of the boy Enrico, and of another son, Rinaldo, also a student at Pisa, was a widow, living on small means, in an obscure lodging near the Porta Romana. A few years before that Carnival-tide, when the aspect of the times in Florence was very different from what it was in 1848, and when the particulars of Signora Palmieri's history were more fresh in the minds of the Florentines, it would hardly have been prudent for a young lady in the position of Stella Altamari to visit her. It was a history that might be worth the telling at length, were it not too long an one to be told as an episode in another. The main facts of it, or rather the results of them, were briefly these. Her husband had been a well-to-do silk-merchant and broker, whose career had been a prosperous one until two misfortunes overtook him. The first of these was a quarrel with the powerful clergy of San Lorenzo, his parish, arising out of certain acts of ecclesiastical oppression, and resulting in a permanent enmity between him and the authorities of the Archiepiscopal Court of Florence. The second, which a due preference for spiritual over temporal interests would, perhaps, classify as a blessing rather than a misfortune, was an intimacy with certain enthusiastic members of the Vau-

dois Church, into which he had been led by various journeys to Turin, connected with the business of his calling. The two circumstances together—it would be invidious to inquire in what exact proportions they were influential on his conduct—made Giovacchino Palmieri into a heretic;—by which term is to be understood not merely one who had no belief whatever in the doctrines or teaching of the Catholic Church—for there would have been nothing remarkable or very dangerous in that—but one who did strongly believe something else.

Now, at that time the Court of Rome was urgently pressing the Grand-Ducal Court of Tuscany to abolish that part of the Leopoldine code which assured a larger measure of ecclesiastical liberty to Tuscany than was enjoyed by any other portion of Italy. The Grand-Duke, who was well persuaded that the soul of his grandfather, the Grand-Duke Peter-Leopold, was in bad plight on account of those laws of his, and whose conscience was uneasy at the retention of them, was very desirous of contenting the Pope in this matter. But the Tuscan population, which has always regarded that Leopoldine code much as an Englishman regards Magna Charta or the Bill of Rights, assumed an attitude on the question, which caused the Grand-Duke's advisers and ministers to recoil before the probable results

of the avowed repeal of it. And the result of this state of things was an extreme desire on the part of the Tuscan government to prove its orthodoxy and devotion to the Papacy, and to prevent any cause being given to Rome to consider or stigmatise Tuscany as tainted with heresy.

Under these circumstances, it will be readily understood that Giovacchino Palmieri was not only a mark for ecclesiastical hatred, but an object of real annoyance and trouble to the government. And the foolish man—(or the wise man, according to the standard of those who may apply either epithet)—would not keep quiet, but played into the hands of his priestly enemies by committing overt acts of religious heterodoxy and insubordination. He not only possessed and read the Bible, but persuaded others to do the like. Already the soul of his wife had been destroyed by his evil influence and teaching; and it was feared that the souls of his children would also be lost. So the pestiferous heretic, inasmuch as the degeneracy of the times and the decay of faith will no longer tolerate the salutary discipline of the stake and fagot, had to undergo his martyrdom by ruin instead of by fire. By ruin, imprisonment, and heart-break, he was done to death at last; and a certain measure of conformity, sufficient for “decency,” was forced upon his widow and children. Carolina Palmieri had been a devoted wife; she

had adopted her husband's opinions ; she had shared his ruin ; and it may be supposed that the lip-service which was forced upon her and her children, for fear of worse, was not very profound or sincere. In consideration of it, however, such as it was, and in consideration of the ruin which had been inflicted on her husband, a free maintenance and education had been offered to the widow for her daughter Clara, the eldest of the family, on the sole condition of her accepting it in a convent at Pistoia. Necessity has no law, and the widow accepted the offer.

Possibly she knew enough of her daughter Clara to be aware that in sending her to the convent she was not so much accepting a dubious benefit, as actively and efficiently carrying on the war against her husband's persecutors. At all events, had the reverend guardians of the fold had the smallest idea of what they were doing when they sent Clara Palmieri into it, they would have preferred any other mode of disposing of her. She was only sixteen at the time she entered the convent ; but she carried with her a mind well stored with the results of her father's teaching, and a heart burning with the recollection of his wrongs. In a word, the Church, in catching Clara Palmieri, had, in the full sense of the original application of the phrase, caught a Tartar ! She was a girl of very considerable powers of

mind, of rare force of character, and of enthusiastic temperament. She had carried to the convent at Pistoia a bitter and inexhaustible hatred against the priests, the government, and the whole constitution of things in Church and State; was ready at any moment to become a conspirator or active enemy to either; and in the mean while satisfied her conscience and her enmity by waging a secret but successful war against them, as an apostle of heresy and liberalism among the pet lambs of the sheepfold into which she had been admitted.

Stella Altamari had been one of her greatest proselytes, if not altogether in respect to matters religious, yet to the utmost extent in matters political. So that she was well prepared to welcome and sympathise with the new hopes that were now dawning on Italy, and to accept as the heroes of her imagination those who distinguished themselves in the work of realising them.

When she had left Pistoia, Clara had asked her to call on her mother at Florence, and to be the bearer of a letter to her. A perfectly trustworthy chance of holding such communication with her mother was not an every-day occurrence with Clara; for of course all letters sent out of the convent, in accordance with the rules of its government, passed under the surveillance of the mother superior. So the opportunity of writing to her mother in all security was a valuable one to her.

When Stella, accompanied by Mademoiselle Zélie, had succeeded in finding the house in which Signora Palmieri lived, and, leaving the carriage at the door, had, to the great astonishment of the footman, climbed to the topmost story of the house, Zélie perceived at once on entering the apartment that her misgivings as to this Clara Palmieri's fitness to be the friend of her charge were well founded. For, in truth, the indications of poverty which met their eyes were unmistakable. There was neither carpet on the floor nor fire on the hearth ; but the tall old woman who sat with a bit of matting under her chair, and a *scaldino*\* under her feet, near the window, was not only clean, but nice looking.

The widow rose from her seat to receive her strange and very smart visitors ; but did not seem inclined to invite them to seat themselves till Stella had made her understand who she was. Then she became all cordiality, and the letter was produced, and the anxious mother, having first apologised to her visitors, proceeded to read it at once.

“ Ah, Signorina ! ” she said, coming across the room to the place where Stella was sitting, and taking

\* A little box with an iron pan of burning braise in it ; sometimes, among the poor, a small earthen pot with a high arched handle is used. And, indeed, the use of the “ scaldino” in this form is so common, that official people in high position may be seen in their offices transacting business with their pot of braise in their hands.

both her hands in hers, “how can I thank you for all the kindness you have shown my poor daughter. She says that the convent life will be doubly dreary now that you have quitted it.”

“It was rather Clara who was kind to me, Signora,” replied Stella. “And I can most truly say that I do not know how I should have got through the weary years without her. Indeed, I may say that the best part of all I learned there has been due to her.”

“Is your daughter, then, my good lady, one of the professed, or is she only a teacher employed by the convent ?” said Zélie.

“Neither one nor the other, Signora,” replied the old woman; “my daughter is merely one of the *educande*.” \*

“Is it possible !” returned Zélie, whose surprise arose from the strangeness of the fact, as it seemed to her, that the daughter of a mother living as Signora Palmieri evidently was, should be receiving the same education with the heiress of the Altamari family.

“But they are very desirous of inducing her to take the veil,” added the mother; “and I am ever in dread lest her refusal should bring new troubles upon us.”

“There are many positions in which it is the best thing one can do !” said Zélie, with a sigh and

\* The phrase by which the pupils in a convent are designated.

a manner which seemed to indicate that she imagined the words embodied a religious sentiment ; “but I suppose,” she added, “nobody wants her to profess herself against her will !”

“There are reasons,” returned Signora Palmieri, sadly, “which have made several of the clergy extremely desirous that my daughter should take the veil. But I suppose,” she continued, turning to Stella, “that you, Signorina, have been acquainted with our story.”

“Oh, Signora, I know it well. There have been no secrets between me and Clara. But my companion has heard nothing of it,” said Stella ; adding, after a moment’s pause, and with a meaning look at the old lady, “but we will talk about Clara’s views on this subject at another time. She led me to think it likely that your younger son would spend the Carnival holidays with you at Florence. Is that so ?”

“Enrico ! yes, Signorina, my little boy is at home. Not at this moment, that is—for he is out somewhere—but he is with me for the holidays.”

“Your little boy, Signora Palmieri ! Why, is not he a student at Pisa ?” asked Stella, who knew very well that he was so, but was desirous of keeping the conversation on the subject of Enrico.

“Yes, Signorina, he is a student, and must soon return to join his brother. And he would not be pleased if he had heard me call him ‘my little

boy ; but, *che vuole ?*\* He is so always to me. And the truth is, that he is young for his age, and he is only fifteen. And he is a delicate child, too ! and my heart misgives me, Signorina, when I think of his going back to Pisa ! ”

“ Nay ! Surely there is nothing very dreadful in a student’s life at Pisa, specially with his brother to take care of him,” said Stella ; adding, with a smile and a sly look at the old lady, “ it is not every day that one runs the risk of being gored to death by a buffalo ! ”

“ What ! you know that story, Signorina ? It’s likely enough ! for my Enrico is never tired of telling it to anybody who will listen to him ! ”

“ But I did not hear it from anybody who heard it from him, Signora. There was another person engaged in the adventure, you know ! ”

“ *Altro !* Don’t imagine that the name of Giulio Malatesta will ever be forgotten by me ! The brave, noble lad ! When I pray for my children, Signorina, I pray for Giulio Malatesta with them. If I thought that a priest’s prayers would do him more good than a mother’s, I would pay for a few masses for him, poor as I am ! But my notion is, that the good God will listen to me more than to the hired prayers of a priest ! What a fine fellow he must be ! I would pay something to be

\* “ What would you have ? ” A constantly recurring expression in the mouth of Tuscans of all classes.

able to give him a mother's thanks and blessing ! You must have heard the story, then, from some one to whom he told it ? ”

“ Well, I don't think he is in the habit of telling it to many people,” returned Stella, who had listened with extreme pleasure to the expressions of Signora Palmieri's gratitude. “ But I heard it from a very intimate friend of his, and—and I think I heard the story right, because—Signor Malatesta was present at the time, and did not contradict any part of it ! ”

“ You know him, then ? ” cried the old lady, eagerly.

“ Yes—slightly ! I have recently been made acquainted with him by an old friend of mine and of my aunt, the Contessa Zenobia—a fellow-student and intimate friend of his, Signor Carlo Brancacci.”

“ Recently ! But not here in Florence ? ” asked Signora Palmieri.

“ Yes ! here in Florence ! Signor Malatesta is here for the Carnival. He is staying in the house of his friend Signor Carlo.”

“ Oh ! I must see him ! I can't let him go from Florence without seeing him, and thanking him for my boy's life ! Enrico, too ! He will be so delighted to bring Signor Giulio to receive his mother's blessing ! I would go to wait on him——”

"Oh no, Signora! I think we can manage it better than that! Signor Carlo could bring him here, or your son might come—but, you were saying, Signora, when we happened to speak of this queer buffalo adventure, that you were anxious about Signor Enrico's return to Pisa?"

"How can I be otherwise, Signorina—and he a mere child! But it is a time for all mothers to be anxious, and for many to have nothing more to be anxious for in this world, before long!"

"You mean because of the war, Signora?" asked Stella, timidly.

Surely, Signorina *mia*! Is it not a time for every Italian woman to be anxious—mothers, wives, and sisters? But the mothers most!—the mothers most, Signorina!"

A sudden thought dashed through Stella's mind that Signora Palmieri had not named all the categories of Italian women whom the coming time would make anxious in Italy; and the idea thus suggested brought a bright blush to her cheek, as she replied:

"But a time also for every Italian mother, wife, and sister, to rejoice and thank God, who has either husband, son, or brother to aid in the good cause, the holy cause! But of your two sons, Signora Palmieri, our country can ask only one of you! From what you say, your second is too young—"

"That is it, Signorina! That is the thing! God forbid that I should grudge to do my part—to give my share of my own flesh and blood. But the child is so young, so childish, so unfitted to encounter hardship, let alone danger! But I fear me, I fear me that he will go! There are plans among the students—he will never consent to stay behind, he will go with his brother!—Hush! That is his step on the stairs!"

And, in the next minute, Enrico Palmieri entered the room, looking not a little astonished at finding two such elegant visitors with his mother.

"These ladies are friends of thy sister, my child!" said she, in reply to his glance of inquiry. "This is the Signorina Stella Altamari, who has most kindly brought me a letter from the convent at Pistoia. But she is also acquainted, as I have found out, with another friend of ours."

The boy coloured up, as he turned towards Stella with a smiling glance of inquiry. He was, as his mother and as Carlo Brancacci had said, evidently a delicate lad, and young of his age; slenderly made, with the complexion and features of a girl more than of a boy, and with a large quantity of light-brown curls waving about his forehead—evidently a nervous temperament and organisation. But there was a bright, intelligent, and eager look about his face, and the mobile expression of his light-blue eye, and delicately-cut

lips, which interested all who came in contact with him.

“I think,” said Stella, with a bright and charming smile, in answer to the questioning of his eyes, “that you have heard of one Giulio Malatesta—a fellow-student of yours, I believe, Signor Enrico?”

“Heard of Giulio Malatesta! Oh, Signorina, do you know Giulio? Have you seen him? Though it is not for me to say it, there are few such fellows in the world as Giulio!”

“Why should you not say it?” asked his mother. “It seems to me it is just what you ought to say, *figliuolo mio!*”

“I only meant, mother, that—that as he is my friend, it did not become me to boast of him,” said Enrico, who had felt as if he had some such right of property in Malatesta as ought to prevent him from speaking too enthusiastically in his praise to strangers; “but, as you say, in truth I cannot say enough good of him, and never shall be able to say all he deserves.”

“Was there not some story of an accident in the Cascine at Pisa?” said Stella, giving the old lady a look which told her to be silent, and let Enrico give his own account of the adventure; “something about a buffalo that ran after Signor Malatesta, and that he ran away from, or some such thing?”

“No, Signora! No such thing at all! I

wonder that people are not ashamed of spreading such lies!" said the boy, while the bright blood rushed up under the transparent skin to the roots of his hair, and his eyes flashed with indignation. "If you wish to know the truth, Signorina, of what happened in the Cascine, *I* can tell it you. I was with a lot of our fellows in the wild part of the forest, half way to Leghorn, nearly, when we came in sight of half a dozen or so of those ugly black brutes—doubtless you have never seen them, Signorina—they are like devil's cows; and one of the beasts edged himself away from the rest, and began pawing the turf, and lashing himself with his long tail. We began to make off as quick as we could walk, for we did not like the way of the brute. When, all of a sudden, he put down his head and rushed after us. Well, we all ran for it; but, as ill luck would have it, I put my foot into a wheel-rut, and rolled over. Then I thought it was all up with me, I can tell you. And in about a minute more, the great black beast would have had his horns into me; when, all of a sudden, Malatesta, passing along a forest track which wound round a clump of pines hard by, saw me on the ground and the buffalo coming towards me. So, instead of running away like all the rest of them, he faced the beast, and ran at him, and turned him. And, if he had not come at that moment, I should certainly have been killed; and, if he had

not succeeded in frightening the brute, *he* would have been killed himself in the attempt to save me. And now I think you will admit, Signorina, that I have reason to speak in praise of Giulio Malatesta!"

"Yes! I think it may be admitted that *you* have reason, Signor Enrico, to think well of this Signor Giulio Malatesta!" said Stella.

"But you must not suppose that I am the only one!" said the boy, eagerly, answering to Stella's emphasis on the word "you," which was slyly intended to produce exactly that effect; "there was the time when he saved the life of Signor Brancacci at Gombo! That was even a worse business than mine with the buffalo!"

And then Enrico proceeded to give the history of that adventure with an abundance of circumstantial detail, which, as it might not interest others as much as it did Stella, may be omitted.

But still Stella seemed unwilling to quit the subject. She had questions to ask, and explanations; and Enrico appeared quite as willing as she to continue the conversation to an indefinite length. Till at last Mademoiselle Zélie declared that if the gentleman had jumped into the water to pull anything else out, the story of it must be told another day, for that the Signora Contessa would think that they were never coming home any more. Whereupon Stella consented to bring her visit to

a conclusion, on the condition that La Zélie would promise to come again another day, together with Carlo Brancacci and Malatesta. For she had set her heart on being present at the meeting between Giulio and Signora Palmieri ; and busied her thoughts as she returned home with plans, to be executed by Carlo Brancacci's assistance, for bringing Malatesta under the avalanche of maternal gratitude that was ready to be poured out on him; without letting him know what was awaiting him.

## CHAPTER VI.

## WHAT CARLO BRANCACCI INTENDED.

THE visit to Signora Palmieri thus planned by Stella was successfully put into execution, nor was it the only one which followed. Two or three times during the ensuing weeks, Mademoiselle Zélie, with her charge and the two young men, returned to spend an hour with the old lady in the Via Romana. As the duty of keeping La Zélie in good humour on these occasions devolved on Carlo, who perfectly well knew how to do so, and who was a great favourite with the little Frenchwoman in consequence, the drives to the Via Romana afforded the other couple of the *partie carrée* opportunities for conversation, which were no longer neglected by either of them. And the visits to Signora Palmieri, and the common interests arising out of her anxieties about her children, had done more to produce an intimacy between Stella and

Giulio, than the course of operas, balls, and parties, at which they had been constantly seeing each other.

But a feeling of intimacy having been thus produced, the balls and the operas did their part of the work, which, to say plainly the truth, Carlo Brancacci fully purposed and intended should be done, and they did it quickly and surely. It was a cleverly imagined stroke of policy, too, on his part, to monopolise himself, as far as possible, all the dances, and all the arm-givings up and down opera-house stairs, and all the spare moments of Stella, that Giulio could not contrive to monopolise for himself. The effect of this strategy was threefold. In the first place, it kept off other pretenders. In the next place, it very effectually threw dust into the eyes of the Florentine Carnival world. The two young men between them pretty well monopolised the beautiful little heiress; and they were inseparable friends. But which of the two was in this matter the hero, and which the friend and confidant, there was nothing beyond the inherent probabilities of the case to show. It was hardly to be believed that Giulio Malatesta, whose social position, and the leading facts of whose history had by this time become well known among the gossips of Florence, should be the admitted suitor of Stella Altamari. But no doubt old Brancacci and the Contessa Zenobia understood what they

were about! A very pretty catch for the Brancacci, such a marriage would be! And no more, some added, than the old Marchese well deserved, as the reward of his faithful and long service! There could be little doubt that Carlo Brancacci was the fortunate man, and his inseparable friend merely his second and aide-de-camp. Then, in the third place, this assiduity on the part of Carlo ensured that Stella's mind should be pretty constantly occupied with the thoughts and ideas that he wished to fill it with. When she was not listening to Malatesta's voice, she was listening to his praises ;—praises uttered apparently without the smallest intention of especially recommending Giulio to her ;—praises with regard to his standing among the young men of the University, with regard to his nobleness of character, and, above all, with regard to the part he had taken, and was taking, in the political movement that was going on among the students ;—praises which were already the sweetest sounds that could fall on Stella's ears.

Among the rest of his constant talk with Stella about Giulio, Carlo had frequently spoken of his unfortunate social position. He felt not only that, in connexion with the rest of the game he was playing, he was bound in honour towards Stella to do so ; but also that in a game, which must at all events in its later stages be played in concert with Malatesta himself, it was useless to play any but a

perfectly open one. It is true that Carlo did not ever speak of Malatesta's position as bearing upon any question of marriage, but merely as the cause of much unhappiness, and, indeed, unreasonable depression to him, and as the true explanation of much of the reserved and retiring haughtiness of nature that was observable in him. And all this was said in such sort as to enlist the compassion of his hearer, whose bright laughing eyes would often take an expression that was more natural than familiar to them, as she listened to the stories, which were so well calculated to send her back to her next *tête-à-tête* with the object of them in the mood most fitted to secure the end at which Carlo was aiming.

And before the Carnival was half over, the truth, which had flashed upon Malatesta with the suddenness of an electric shock at the moment of that first meeting with Stella on the winter walk in the Cascine, had more gradually made itself unmistakably manifest to her also. She at length knew, and admitted to herself that she knew, that she loved Giulio Malatesta. It might have been anticipated that the manner in which the great master-passion would manifest itself in those two natures would have been exactly the reverse of that which was in fact the case; that the proud, reserved, melancholy, unhoping nature of the man would have yielded to the passion slowly, cau-

tiously, strugglingly, and gradually ; and that the warm-natured, impulsive, happy-hearted girl whose past had done nothing towards teaching her misgiving or caution, would have fallen at once into the toils. It was not so ! And the fact that the exact reverse was the case is illustrative of the manifold variety and complexity of the qualities which go to the producing of the diversities of human character. There were latent qualities in the depths of both these natures, which showed themselves more powerful for the shaping of the course of each in the matter of this great passion, the peculiarity of which is to stir up all the deeper and more hidden strata of the soul, than were those superinduced habitudes of the mind and temper of each of them, which had been generated by the specialities of their social position.

Stella did not *fall* in love. She, as some writer has phrased it well, walked quietly into it ; not quite knowing whither she was going at the outset of the path ; but with her eyes open, and on the alert to take note of every object which could enlighten her on the subject as she proceeded. And she had made no effort to retrace her steps when she had first began clearly to understand whither they were leading her. The best judgment she could bring to bear upon the subject sanctioned the choice her heart had made with full approval. And there was in Stella a healthy, direct

honesty of purpose, and a clearness of mind on certain fundamental principles of opinion and conduct, that assisted materially in the formation of a judgment, and in the confidence with which she accepted the verdict of her own mind.

It is true that she would have gladly welcomed the support and assistance of any other in whose heart and judgment she could confide. But there was only one such, and she was inaccessible even by letter. She would have given much to have had Clara Palmieri by her side during the progress of that Carnival; she would have given much to have been able even to write to her freely. But convent discipline forbade any such communication with the outer world.

And there was none other! Stella was not unattached to her aunt; she was grateful to her for much kindness, for much indulgence, and for a large share of happiness. But it never occurred to her even to put the question to herself, why not confide in her aunt? why not open her heart to her, and call her to counsel? It seemed instinctive to her to feel that any such confidence was utterly out of the question;—that she might as well seek to find comfort and support from some creature of quite a different kind. Was she not, indeed, a creature of quite a different kind? As for La Zélie, she was, if possible, worse! And besides all other more than sufficient disqualifications, she had from the

very first taken an aversion to Giulio ; which had only, as far as Stella was concerned, served to make her feel more strongly than ever, that between her and La Zélie there would never be any community of feeling or thinking upon any subject.

So Stella had had to direct her steps by the unassisted light that was in her, and by the application of that to the facts gleanable from the abundant chattering of Carlo and Enrico Palmieri. But that way of walking into love, instead of falling into it, is a very safe one, and has special advantages of its own. And those who fancy that the method is in any wise incompatible with intensity of passion when it has been walked into, or with any portion of the poetry, romance, or exquisite savour thereof, know nothing about the matter. Stella could now, some fifteen years after the date of the events here described, tell them a very different story.

In one respect, however, she had been walking in a mist of delusion. She had utterly misinterpreted the significance of her aunt's words, actions, and character. Liberalism was the fashion at that time ; liberalism of all sorts—in politics, in social philosophy, in religion. When it was the fashion to wear high head-gear or low-cut dresses, La Zenobia wore her head-gear higher, and her dresses lower than anybody else. And now her liberalism was louder and more thorough-going than that of the world in which she lived. To La Zenobia it

seemed, moreover, but the coming into vogue again of the fashion of her youth. The *lestè* style of phraseology, the *crâne* tone of sentiment, which remained in poor old Zenobia's mind laid up in the lavender of youthful associations, constituted for her the liberalism which had "come in" again, and was to be brought out and paraded as the newest thing in morals and sentiment. And many a dubious phrase culled from the repertories of that convenient French speech, which the genius of Frenchmen makes so precise, clear, and logical, when treating of scientific or material matters, and so elastic, misty, and indefinite, when busied with the moral world, fell from the lips of the Contessa, meaning either nothing, or, if anything, an adhesion to maxims of moral laxity; but which Stella interpreted as a profession of emancipation from those prejudices and social conventionalisms which are in reality most opposed to the doctrines and notions of those who would hurry the world on the path of progress. Poor Stella, in the innocence of her own simple straightforward political faith, imagined that her aunt was in reality free from any of those old-world notions, as she herself considered them, which would have opposed themselves to such a marriage as she was beginning to contemplate as the only one she would ever consent to make. She was confirmed in her impression by the absence of all attempt on the part of the Contessa to put

any obstacle in the way of her intercourse with Giulio. Clearly, she thought, my aunt feels as I do on these subjects. She knows that it is not a man's title or his birth that can make him estimable or lovable! And as to means, shall I not have plenty;—not to mention that Giulio is sure to distinguish himself in the great social movements which are on the eve of falling out.

It was the less surprising that Stella should have deceived herself on this point, in that Carlo Brancacci had been equally taken in by the Contessa Zenobia's pseudo-liberalism. He also fancied that little or no difficulty would be made about permitting a marriage between the wealthy heiress and a man so certain, as he conceived, to take a distinguished part in the great events with which the political future of Italy was pregnant. Though a far less ardent politician and patriot than Malatesta and most others of their comrades and contemporaries at Pisa, partly from the natural careless lightness of his character, and partly in consequence of his aristocratic and courtly connexions, Carlo Brancacci had as firm a belief as any of them in the greatness of the social changes at hand, and in the new career that they were to open to unfriended merit in all kinds. He had, further, an unlimited faith in Malatesta; and though not pretending to look into the probabilities of the good time coming with sufficient clearness to discern whether he was to emerge

from the general shuffle, which was to change so many places, as a commander-in-chief or a prime minister, he doubted nothing as to his rising in some shape to the top of the tree, and as such presenting himself, after a short interval to be occupied in the achievement of this greatness, as a very proper and acceptable *parti* for the heiress.

Those persons who may fancy that such hopes and fancies as these argue Carlo Brancacci to have been a specially romantic, specially sanguine, or specially unwise young man, had not an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the state of the popular mind in Italy at the memorable time referred to. Those who had such opportunity will know that he was neither more unreasonable nor more sanguine in his anticipations of the future than his fellows.

He was, indeed, far less unreasonable in his expectations than the great majority of them. For Malatesta really was one from whom much might be expected. He combined in a rare degree the two great mutually-controlling and yet mutually-completing qualities of fiery enthusiasm and calm self-restraint. Those who knew him but as an ordinary acquaintance, considered him, especially for an Italian, a singularly cold and unimpulsive man. But those who knew him well, were aware that this habitual self-restraint did but act the part, as it were, of the furnace door, which restrains and confines, but, at the same time, concen-

trates and intensifies, the action of the fire it shuts in. He was capable of all the self-devotion of a woman, controlled and directed by the courage and truthfulness of a man. His ardent patriotism took no colour from any reflection of self prospectively; and, retrospectively, was only so far tinged by his own wrongs and those of his mother as to be conscious of the spur of a righteous indignation. Nevertheless, the special school of political feeling and ideas to which he belonged was the least violent of the different shades of opinion which at that time divided the youth of Italy. There was a lofty vein of poetry and high aspiration in his mental constitution, which secured him as a disciple of the splendid, but fatally utopian, Giobertinian teaching. Many of the best minds of the rising generation at that time were captivated by those grand and golden dreams;—of the best minds, if the purest, the most poetical, and the most high toned are to be considered such;—not the best, if we allow the term only to the most useful, the most practical, and the clearest.

The Utopia which Gioberti and his school pointed out to his countrymen as a promised land from the Pisgah-heights of his humanitarian faith, was, in truth, a seductive and pleasant-looking country, specially in the eyes of men who were fully purposed to leave their Egypt and all its fleshpots, together with its bondage, behind them, and who, nevertheless, did not as yet very clearly

see any other well-defined and satisfactory path through the desert-sands that lay in front. Take the splendid theory and the stupendous story of the Papacy;—present the former elaborated into more than its own best form and *grandeur*;—extract from the latter not so much all that it contains of good or great, as all the possibilities of goodness and greatness that any of its phases have suggested;—commend the ideal thus formed to exclusive patriotism and national self-love, by representing it as a special and unrivalled Italian production, heritage, and possession, and a guarantee for future Italian primacy;—appeal to those higher and larger social aspirations which keep alive the belief in human progress, urge men to the realisation of it, and raise the work of revolution above the sphere of mere political interests and contests; promise also to those finer and subtler cravings of the human soul which demand some clue of connexion with the world of the unseen, and some means of satisfaction for spiritual thirst, the resting-place of an ideal neither too new and strange to be acceptable, nor too narrow and discredited to be longer tenable;—such was the Giobertinian recipe and theory for the regeneration of Italy; and it is not surprising that it found favour with many of the choicer spirits among the Italian youth.

Faith was needed for the climbing of that Pisgah-height from which this beautiful mirage of a pro-

mised land was yisible. And all the ingenuous youth with fair high narrow foreheads, not too square at the corners nor too broad at the brows, went up, and prophesied much in those days of all that they saw there.

Of course such climbing was not for the multitude, for want of any faith at all. But there were also many who declined to go up by reason of the firm faith that was in them, that if the world stood upon an elephant ever so mighty, and the elephant upon a tortoise ever so firm, and the tortoise upon a lie ever so specious and useful, the whole would go headlong into the abyss at no distant day.

But Giulio Malatesta at that time went up with others to the Giobertinian Pisgah-top, not because he had faith in the possibility of good being evolved from a lie, but because the poetical and enthusiastic temperament is not lynx-eyed for the discovery of a lie when it is draped in the purple raiment of shining imaginations.

Upon the whole, then, it cannot be said that Carlo Brancacci's faith in Malatesta was an unfounded or absurd one ; or, taking into due consideration the seething condition of men's minds at that time, and the prevailing impression that a new era was about to open, in which high courage, talent, and patriotism were sure to make their way into the new world's first ranks, that it was an altogether preposterous idea that the due winning of Stella's hand might be within his reach.

## CHAPTER VII.

## YOUNG EYES.

THERE were three persons, and three only, to whose minds the idea of the possibility of a marriage between the brilliant beauty and great heiress Stella Altamari and the friendless student Giulio Malatesta, had as yet presented itself. These three were the parties concerned themselves, and Carlo Brancacci. It has been seen that Stella had permitted herself to enter, and was suffering herself to pursue the path that opened before her, without any serious misgiving as to the goal to which it was leading her. Each step in advance, she was well aware, made return more and more impossible for her. But with each step, also, the path became more and more lovely and pleasant. And she walked on in it, nothing doubting.

Carlo Brancacci also was, as has been seen, of good heart in the matter. To him also it seemed

that the marriage in question was a feasible one, likely to be prosperously carried out, and to make the happiness of both parties. And he was perfectly contented with the progress that was being made in the matter.

But it remains to inquire what Malatesta's own ideas and feelings were on the subject.

When he had, before he was introduced to the Contessa Zenobia, talked half jokingly, half sadly, of escaping from that ordeal by rushing into the shelter of the neighbouring wood, he had spoken from a general sense of the barrier that existed between him and "society," in the narrowly technical sense of that word. The oppression arising from that never absent sense, which he could not shake off, made him a shy man, which is a phenomenon rarely met with among Italians, and which no component part of his nature would have made him under other circumstances. But when that ceremony had been undergone, and his consequent introduction to Stella had taken place, and had produced on him the effect which has been described, he began to think that in sober earnest and sadness, his wisest course would be to run away even then from the danger he was in. That danger, however, was of a kind from which men rarely do run away, however lively may be their sense of it. They very constantly promise themselves that they will run away as soon as the

danger shall have discovered itself to be more certainly and fatally dangerous. By the time Malatesta on the evening of that day had reached the quietude of his own chamber, to which he had all through the afternoon and evening hours been adjourning the more serious examination of the subject, the danger had become very decidedly recognisable and imminent. And he came to the natural conclusion that prudence, wisdom, discretion, duty, self-preservation, and sundry fine qualities and judicious considerations, imperatively counselled a hasty retreat. His little garret chamber at Pisa was ready for him at a minute's notice ; he had nothing to do but to jump into the daily or nightly diligence, and be in safety. Yes ! It was quite clear that that was the thing to do ! But he did not do it. More foolish than the moth, which flies to its shining death in the lamp-flame, he knew that the brightness would burn, nay, would assuredly burn him to death, if he continued to flutter round it, yet he exercised the indubitable prerogative of free will to remain where he was, and be burned !

Suppose he liked to be burned, better than to escape from that burning ! But consideration for the lady ! Was he not in honour bound to guard against "engaging her affections ?" That, I believe, is the correct wording of the clause in the statute made and provided for such cases.

This misdemeanour of engaging a lady's affections is a very favourite subject of enlargement with the casuists, who have occupied themselves with the moralities of this great department of human conduct ;—with a knowledge of the subject about equal to that which other graver and more erudite casuists possess of the various passions they have undertaken to define, measure, weigh, and label. Did any man in love ever dream that there was any possibility of the danger contemplated occurring to the object of his passion ? Young love is of its essential nature hopeless. However reasonably high a man may rate his own qualities, circumstances, advantages, at other moments, they suddenly become valueless in his estimation in proportion to the amount of worthiness needed for the object in view. To any other conquest he feels himself not altogether unequal. He may look round on all he knows or has seen of beauty, wit, rank, and wealth combined, and feel that he is good enough for any one of the galaxy ; might sue for her love on equal terms ; and, possibly, therefore, if he sued lightly, might do the mischief in question. But how can he expect the one bright particular star to shine exclusively on him ? In comparison with her, his beauty is deformity, his wit stupidity, his moral worth turpitude, his wealth dross ! Eligible eldest sons may commendably be warned not so to throw the handkerchief as to

engender fond expectations of an “establishment” never destined to be realised. But the most eligible eldest son of the season, if once the boy-god’s arrow have pierced the integuments of embroidered shirt-front, and veritably quivered in his heart, will straightway feel that acres and coronet are as dust in the balance, and will scoff with bitter derision at the suggestion, that there is any likelihood of his readily “engaging the lady’s affections.” And if, as is very possible, my gallant young friend, Lord Plantagenet Loveless, may “beg to say,” that “for his pa-at he neval felt anything of the kah-ind,” I can only beg to say, for my part, that whatever acquaintance his lordship may have had with the other branch of the divine family, he never had the least knowledge of the god Anteros.

In a word, all the stereotyped talk inculcating on young gentlemen the duty of not allowing themselves to be too fascinating to the pretty creatures who fly within the sphere of their radiance, however applicable any part of its cautions may be to those who are *not* in love, is, with regard to those who are so, simply bosh,—like most of the talk which attains to stereotype honours.

As for poor Giulio Malatesta, the notion that his miserable presence in Florence, or his absence from it, could in any way affect the happiness of Stella Altamari, would have appeared to him more

preposterous than any other imaginable absurdity. No! it was only his own despair and misery that was in question. And, after all, should he be less miserable away at Pisa? Was it not already too late to fly? Was not the mischief irreparably done? Would he not carry with him the deadly arrow fixed in his heart? So misery for misery, he preferred misery near her to misery away from her, and remained.

And then, contrary to all his ideas of antecedent probability, to his great surprise he found himself, without act or deed of his own, made an habitual inmate of the temple in which his divinity dwelt, and placed in almost constant association with her. It was the natural result, he pointed out to himself, of the Brancacci and Altamari intimacy. But was it possible, as the weeks went on, to avoid perceiving that Stella's ear was always ready for any word of his; that Stella's hand for a dance was always his when he asked for it! Evidently the manifestations of the gratitude of that gentle heart for the service he had rendered Carlo Brancacci;—which he was sick of hearing mentioned, and could almost find in his heart to repent of having performed!

There were plenty of other symptoms, too, legible enough by more experienced and less passion-blinded eyes; but illegible by Giulio. Were those repeated visits to Signora Palmieri in her garret

in the Via Romana wholly due to Stella's pleasure in that old lady's society? Was it absolutely necessary that those visits should always be made, merely because such had been the case in the first instance, with the escort of Brancacci and his inseparable friend? The sudden flush, which so frequently overspread that cheek, whose transparent skin betrayed the slightest emotion to instant detection, was probably due to constitutional imperfection in the circulation. But it was a remarkable coincidence, that it occurred invariably when Malatesta entered the room or approached her. That little shortness of breath, too, which a curious eye might have detected in the slightly accelerated motion of the lace on her snowy bosom, was doubtless due to a tendency to chronic asthma. But, again, the attack never failed to be coincident with the same circumstances. In short, if anybody else, save the person interested in the discovery, had been in Malatesta's place, Stella's secret would have been easily divined. But still Giulio remained blind;—perversely so, Stella would have thought in her heart of hearts, if she had been able to read exactly all that there was in his. For though she did all in her power to hide her secret, yet it would have seemed right, that that all should have proved too little to conceal it from his eyes.

Nevertheless, as the days of continual intercourse went on, the intimacy between them neces-

sarily increased; and at last it came to pass that Malatesta's eyes were in some degree opened.

He happened to go one day alone to the lodging of Signora Palmieri, having to send some message to Pisa, which he purposed doing by means of Enrico writing to his brother Rinaldo.

"This is the first opportunity I have had," said Enrico, as Giulio was about leaving the widow's apartment, "of congratulating you, Signor Giulio, on your '*fidanzata*.'\* Faith, you do not give one much opportunity of seeing you out of her company. And I should do as much in your place. What an angel of beauty and goodness!"

Giulio was absolutely too much astonished and confounded at this address to be able to interrupt the boy. He coloured up to the roots of his hair, and his heart seemed to stand still in his bosom, as he managed to say at last, with a violent effort to appear unconcerned while doing so :

"What are you talking about? What *stravaganze* have you got into your head, Enrico *mio*? *I* with a *fidanzata*! *I!* A very likely story indeed!"

"*Bravo! bravo, davvero!*† Very well done, Signor Giulio!" cried the boy, laughing roguishly. "Your words would be perfectly convincing, did

\* "Betrothed." A girl between her betrothal and her marriage is commonly so called.

† "In truth."

they not betray their own falsity with the utmost ingenuity! But come now, confess! You think I am a baby, not to be trusted. But I have got eyes in my head. I am more than nine days old! Come now, trust me! You know you can!"

"My dear Enrico," said Malatesta, who by that time had recovered the possibility of appearing outwardly calm, although the boy's words had stirred up a whole legion of whirling and jostling thoughts within him, and his brain was still reeling with them, "has this mad Carnival-time really made you crazy? Can you really believe anything so preposterous as that there should be aught between me and the Contessina Stella Altamari more than the most ordinary acquaintance?"

"I don't understand," said Enrico, almost crossly, "why you should be so anxious to mislead me in the matter; and still less, why you should set me down as such an ass as to think it possible to deceive me. Have you ever seen anything in me, since we have been friends, to justify you in treating me so?"

"My dear boy, if I had a secret to confide to anybody, I know no one whom I would sooner trust it with than yourself. But it seems to me that it is rather for me to pout and say, What have you ever seen in me that you won't believe me when I tell you the truth?"

"But it is impossible!" said the boy, after

staring Malatesta in the face for a while in silence  
—“it is impossible, surely!”

Malatesta shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of impatience.

“Well! I can tell you this,” continued Enrico, “if I am really to suppose it possible that you don’t know it already: if you don’t care about the Signorina Stella, she cares about you!”

“Cares about *me*!” cried Malatesta, with an energy and bitterness that alone was sufficient to betray his secret to a more experienced ear.

“Yes! cares about *you*!—cares about you in a way that I would give one of my eyes for just such a girl to care about me! And you play the insensible! For shame, Signor Giulio!”

“But, seriously now, Enrico *mio*, since it seems that you really are serious in this absurd delusion, tell me what on earth has put such a ridiculous notion into your head,” returned Malatesta, who felt that the hot blood was rushing up all over his face and head as he spoke, despite his utmost endeavour to prevent it.

“Do you forget, Giulio,” said Enrico, looking steadily into his companion’s face, “that I have been present during—let me see—three—four visits of Signorina Stella to my mother when you were there. Ay! you never failed to be there!”

“And was not Brancacci there too? What of that? I was brought by him.”

"Oh yes ! Brancacci was there too, just to mark the difference in her way to him and her way to you. I say again, do you think I have no eyes, or no understanding for such things ? Do you mean to say, now, that you are conscious of no difference in her manner to you and her manner to Carlo Brancacci ?"

"Brancacci is an old friend, and I am a new acquaintance," said Malatesta ; and his conscience accused him of shuffling as he spoke.

"*Che ! che ! che ! che ! che-e-e-e !*" scoffed Enrico, with a gesture of mocking incredulity, as he prolonged the versatile Tuscan expletive into a scornful hoot ; "do ladies distinguish their new acquaintances from their old friends by stealing such looks at them under their eyelids as I have seen the Contessina stealing at you ? Do they always colour up when their new acquaintances speak a word to them ? How long must their acquaintance with a man be, before they are able to touch his hand in going down stairs, or getting into a carriage, without looking as if it took their breath away, pray ? You think I have no eyes !"

"I think," said Malatesta, speaking with a degree of severity that he had not used before, "that you have taken a lot of fancies into your boy's head which ought never to have entered it, and which, having entered it, ought never to have been spoken

—even to me ; and which I should be seriously angry if you were ever to speak of to any one else.”

“ Why, you are not going to be angry with me, Giulio,” said poor Enrico, dismayed. “ Surely if you saw nothing of all I have said, it ought to be very welcome hearing to you. I’ll answer for it, nine out of ten of the young fellows in Florence would give their ears to know as much ! ”

“ But even if I were among the nine, I don’t know or believe any such thing,” returned Malatesta, who was longing for Enrico to commit over again the offence he had been scolding him for.

“ Come, now ! ” said he, “ if you think that I am too much of a boy to understand such things, will you take the testimony of an old woman ? Ask my mother what *she* thinks about it ? ”

“ You don’t mean to say that your mother has made any remark on the subject ? ” asked Giulio, hardly knowing what answer to the question would best satisfy him.

“ *Altro !* ” cried Enrico, nodding his head with much significance. “ Why, the last time you had been here, we talked it all over, *la mamma* and I, when you were gone. Lord bless you ! she saw the truth plain enough ! and, what is more, she thought it was very clear that you were as much in love with her as she with you ! And small blame to you, I should say ! ”

“ Will you tell me now, Enrico, without any

joking at all, what your mother really did say on the subject," asked Malatesta, gravely.

"But I have not been joking at all!" expostulated Enrico. "She *did* say just what I have been telling you. And I am sure she was not joking. She never jokes, *la povera mamma!* She said, if you must know exactly, that she never saw two young people so thoroughly in love with each other;—that that was the way marriages ought to be made;—and that if all matches were in such sort, matrimony would turn out better than it often did. She said, too, if you *will* have the whole of it, that she never saw a handsomer couple, and that you richly deserved your good fortune! So you see, Giulio, if I am crazy, there are other and older heads than mine equally addled!"

Malatesta remained silent and pondering for a while before he spoke again. At last he said :

"Well, Enrico, I will prove to you that you were wrong when you complained that I would not trust you. I will confide to you what I have confided to no living soul, and would not, I think, confide to any other. I do know that I can trust you. Your mother was right enough, at least in one-half of what she thought she saw! No man, I think, ever loved a woman as I love her! But it never entered into my head to dare to hope that my love was returned, or even guessed. I have never told it—and never shall!"

"Thank you, Giulio! thank you for trusting me!" said Enrico, very proud of his position of confidant; "but you will have to tell her, or else there will be a couple of broken hearts, that's all! You may depend on it, women can understand one another; and my mother would not have spoken in that way if she had not been very sure of what she was saying. Would you like to speak to her about it! You can trust her, *la povera buona mamma!*"

"No! I cannot do that! I can hardly bring myself to speak to you on the subject. But I will believe at least the accuracy of your report of what she said."

"Indeed you may! She said all that I have told you. And you may depend upon it she is not mistaken."

"Ah! if you could tell all that I would give to be able to fancy so. Think of me and of what I am! Is it likely, Enrico *mio*, that such a girl as Stella Altamari should think of me?"

"Well! honestly I should say—very likely. But likely or not likely, it is very certain that she does!"

Malatesta continued absorbed in his own meditations for several minutes; and then suddenly jumping up, said :

"Addio! Enrico! I know I can trust you to be discreet! Addio!"

"But, Giulio!" cried Enrico, catching him by the hand as he was going, "one more word! and forgive me for saying it! Remember how great a wrong you may be doing her by doubting too much!"

Malatesta wrung the boy's hand as he looked with affection at him; saying as he did so:

"Some woman will love you one day, Enrico!"

And then he went to meditate on what he had heard, during a solitary stroll on that winter walk where he had first seen Stella, and where, at that hour of the morning, he was pretty sure of being alone.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE VEGLIONE.

GIULIO's meditations during the first part of his solitary ramble were not of an unpleasant nature. Despite the pertinacity of his preconceived idea that such a thing must be wholly out of the question, despite the misgiving and self-depreciating tendencies of his mind, it was impossible for him honestly to compare the assertions which had been made to him by Enrico, with the long catalogue of priceless events treasured up in his memory, without admitting to himself that there were grounds for the conclusion to which the old lady and the young boy had come. There was that time when she had told Carlo, on his asking her to dance the cotillon with him, that she believed she was engaged to Signor Malatesta, looking up into his face as she told the fib. For it was a fib! Certainly

Giulio had never asked her! He told himself at the time that it was merely a mistake, a forgetfulness about an utterly unimportant matter. But then that look! It was but a quarter of a glance, momentary as an electric shock, shy as a fawn by the side of its mother! But Giulio remembered it as accurately as if he had studied it for an hour. Then there was that memorable occasion of the conversation in the carriage one morning when Stella, and Zélie, and Carlo and he were going to see *La Palmieri*. There had been a question whether a diffident or a confident wooer was more likely to be successful. Zélie and Carlo had been strong in favour of the latter. Giulio had taken the other side; and when Stella had supported his view in a very marked manner, and Zélie had cried out that she had heard *La Signorina Stella* say quite the reverse on some other occasion, she curtly answered that, if so, she had changed her opinion. Above all, there was that never-to-be-forgotten moment when, as he and Stella were talking one night as he was leading her into the tea-room at a crowded ball at the *Casino die Nobili*, and the conversation had fallen, he knew not how, on the topic of the chances and changes of the future, which had led him to say that the best lot for him would be to fall in the moment of a victory that should drive the Austrians beyond the frontier, he had suddenly felt her hand tighten on his

arm with a momentary grasp. Was it true? or was it fancy, or accident? He had meditated the matter again and again, and had come to think that it could not have been really true. But now again the anecdote was brought out with the other treasures of memory of the like sort, and once more carefully reviewed by the light of the new commentary.

All these precious stores had been often brought forth by him from the hiding-places of memory like miser's treasures, to be gloated over, questioned, and speculated on. But they appeared now to have acquired a new significance. The last words that Enrico had said to him sounded in his conscience; and he determined to admit hope into his soul.

But even then, what hope? The hope that Stella was not indifferent to him! And what then? If that were indeed so, would it not ensure the misery of two instead of his wretchedness only? Was there any remotest hope that she would be permitted by those who had authority over her to unite her lot with his? At all events, he must not quit Florence without speaking to her. He felt the truth of what Enrico had said to him. He would, at all events, let her know the truth from his own lips. And in the contemplation of this task, it was an inexpressible comfort to him to think that Brancacci had long ago taken care that Stella should not be ignorant of the peculiar social

position in which he stood. He would have no confession to utter on that head. Stella would have at least no painful discoveries to make from his communication to her !

He finally determined, therefore, to avow his love before leaving Florence. His departure had long since been fixed for the first day in Lent, and already the Carnival was waning. It behoved him not to put off much longer looking out for an occasion fitted for the arduous task. But the days went by, and no opportunity, which he could persuade himself to consider as a sufficiently favourable one, offered itself.

It came to the last Sunday in Carnival ; Giulio had fully made up his mind that the words he had to say should be whispered during the *festa*-day's walk in the Cascine that afternoon. But he had forgotten that there was the grand full-dress *corso* for that Sunday, and that the Contessa Zenobia would no more think of failing to attend it, than she would of shutting herself up for the remainder of her days.

A *corso* is a peculiarly and essentially Italian amusement. It consists in simply driving round the city through a prescribed line of streets. As it is arranged that at a certain point the carriages turn round and return by the same route, there are, of course, two lines of vehicles proceeding in opposite directions ; and by this arrangement there is a

chance of an opportunity of saluting your acquaintances as they pass you. Without this exciting possibility, the *corso*, after some hours of it, and many years' practice of the institution, might risk becoming dull. For, of course, the same carriage precedes and the same follows yours during the whole performance, and it is executed at a solemn foot pace. An Englishman once, on being asked how he liked the *corso*, replied that we had a very similar practice in England, but that we reserved it for the occasion of funerals.

The *corso* is, however, in many respects very essentially Italian. Italian love of ostentation, and Italian superiority to the shamefacedness of poverty, are both curiously manifested in it. The ostentation has a frank avowedness about it which is peculiarly Italian. It is ostentation openly acknowledging itself and professing to be ostentatious. The state carriage—or two of them, if possible—the plated harness, the grand liveries for as many servants as can be stuck on the vehicle, the handsome pair—or, if possible, two pair—of horses, are all brought out for this occasion only. In the carriage sits, glorious in the sight of the whole city, the mistress or the master, or both of them, of the establishment to which it belongs. For Italian men, with the exception of such as have begun to feel the influence of the foreign ways and fashions made common in Florence by the cosmopolitan society which always

exists there in great force—Italian men, *pur sang*, have none of that need to employ their own limbs in some sort, which makes an Englishman feel that the great family carriage is rather a place for his wife than for him, and that he would prefer to be on horseback, or himself the driver of some less majestic style of carriage. Among many other imitable qualities, to an Italian man has also been given the faculty of sitting in perfect contentment, while alone in a carriage in full morning dress, admirably gloved and hair-dressed, he is for two or more consecutive hours dragged at a snail's pace at the tail of another carriage ! All honour to heroic endurance !

And the carriage at the tail of which he is patiently drawn in triumph, may very likely be the shabbiest hack in the town, drawn by the wretchedest, mud-bespattered little animal, and driven by the seediest of all possible jarvies. And in this poverty-steeped equipage shall be, perhaps, four young fellows in the prime of their age, with gloves of as spotless *paille* as the aristocrat in the carriage behind them, enjoying their *corso* wholly unabashed and untroubled by any consciousness of the incongruousness of their *mise en scène*. And this speciality of the humours of a *corso* is also essentially Italian.

Such is the *corso* of sundry high days and holidays in the course of the year. But the *corso* on

the last days of Carnival has some characteristics of its own. Various more or less rough fun goes on, as is well known, on the two last days of the Carnival ; but this is not the case on the Sunday. The *corso* of that day is essentially a full-dressed pageant. Flowers may be tossed from carriage to carriage ; and many go provided with huge baskets of green-house bouquets for the purpose ; but no rougher pelting takes place. The streets, however, are full of masquers—almost wholly of the lower classes of the people—and many of the younger portion of the society prefer to remain on foot for the chance of exchanging a salutation, or may be a word, or possibly two or three, with the fair occupants of the carriages.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the *corso* could offer no opportunity for the conversation Malatesta had determined to have with Stella. He and Brancacci were on foot among the carriages, and Giulio had the opportunity of putting a little nosegay of violets into Stella's hand, and exchanging a little squeeze of fingers as he did so, but that was all.

The all-important conversation had to be deferred once again to some more propitious occasion.

That evening and the Monday passed without affording Giulio the opportunity he was in search of. It seemed as if, in order to punish him for

having neglected to take advantage of the many propitious occasions the past walks had offered, these last days would go by without allowing him the smallest possibility of repairing the omission.

But one chance remained, and it was absolutely the last.

The reader has already been told what a "*veglione*" is. Well! there is always a *veglione* at the Pergola on the last Sunday in Carnival, and also on the last night, that of the Tuesday, before Ash-Wednesday, that *dies iræ* of (supposed) sack-cloth and ashes, when revelry is over and repentance (as per programme) begins. There are *veglioni* also at the other theatres, but that at the Pergola, which is to Florence what the Opera House is to London, is almost exclusively attended by the *grand monde*.

Of these the gayest and the most fervent observers of Carnival-tide are wont, either on the Sunday or the Tuesday night, to have a gay supper in their box, which is amply large enough to accommodate some eight or ten guests, besides affording space for any chance masquers who may join the frolicsome party for a five minutes' chatter, in that peculiar falsetto tone which is adopted as the best mode of concealing the voice, and a—sure to be hospitably offered—glass of champagne.

And among the gayest and most inveterate of Carnival-keepers, who so gay and so sure to be

foremost in all the gayest and “fastest” doings as the Contessa Zenobia! Of course there was a supper in the Altamari box at the Pergola. Of the two nights, the Tuesday night is, perhaps, the more furiously frolic festivity of the two, because it finally ends the Carnival revel. At twelve o’clock exactly this ending ought to take place. But in lax, easy-going Florence custom has enacted a law which allows three hours’ grace, and Carnival expires in the Pergola at precisely three o’clock on Ash-Wednesday morning. At that hour the great central chandelier of the theatre slowly begins to descend from its place in mid-air, and the last prank of the revellers is to flip out the lights in it, and in other parts of the theatre, with their handkerchiefs, and then to go forth as best they may into Lenten darkness.

So it was on the Tuesday night that the Contessa Zenobia had her supper in her box at the Pergola.

Of course the Marchese Florimond was the centre and soul of the festival. Of course his nephew was an honoured guest, and of course his nephew’s inseparable friend was of the merry party.

Giulio Malatesta was, to say the truth, not exactly the man for such a festal occasion at any time. His spirits, which rarely, if ever, mounted to the point needed for the making of such a scene pleasant, either to himself or those around him,

were apt to be perversely lowered in tone on such occasions. The phenomenon is by no means a rare one in the case of men of his temperament; and psychologists can no doubt easily explain it.

And it may be readily imagined that on the present occasion he was less in a Carnival mood than usual. He had determined that he would find an opportunity at the theatre that night of having the momentous conversation with Stella, which he had been obliged to defer from hour to hour, and from day to day, for the last week past. In the first place, it was to be then or not at all ; for he was to leave Florence the next morning, and to see her no more after parting at the door of the theatre. In the second place, the opportunity was not so unfavourable an one as it might seem.

Custom does not permit ladies of condition on these occasions to quit their box, or join the motley multitude of masquers and dancers in the area of the theatre, unless under the shelter of the all-covering domino and silken mask. Even thus, it would not be “the thing” for a lady to pass the night in that manner. But it is permissible to don a domino and mask, and, accepting the arm of some trusted cavalier, to make an excursion from the haven of the box, and take a turn among the crowd below, or visit and mystify—if the masquer be frolicsomely inclined—the inhabitants of some

other box. Many Florentine mothers, it is fair to observe, would not permit their daughters to do this. Many would not bring them to a *veglione* at all. But the reader knows the Contessa Zenobia well enough to be quite sure that in all such matters her theory would not err on the side of over-strictness. And it had been arranged among the young folks, including Zélie upon this special occasion in that category, that she and Stella should make a "*giro*"\* with Carlo and Giulio. Plain black silk dominoes, with white edging round the hoods, and black silk masks similarly edged, had been provided for the two ladies; and the gentlemen had chosen dominoes and masks ornamented in like sort with scarlet. It is always usual on these occasions to select some such special mark, that the members of a party may be sure of recognising each other. (Also, it is not unusual for some of the members of a party, who have adopted by common agreement this means of being known to their friends, to provide a second mask and domino, to be slyly exchanged for the first, in order that, *le cas échéant*, they may *not* be recognised by them.)

There was no need, however, for any such mystification in the instance in question. When the supper was over, while the Contessa Zenobia was sitting in the front of her box intensely happy, receiving the burlesqued compliments, and listening

\* A "turn" of the theatre.

to the mystifications of half Florence (for everybody knew La Zenobia, and everybody laughed at her), and was taking all in perfectly good part, and offering champagne to all comers, the two ladies and the two gentlemen slipped on their disguises in the back of the box, and sallied forth—taking due care, of course, that Zélie fell to the share of Brancacci, and Stella to that of Giulio—an arrangement that was very easily secured, as it coincided with the wishes of each one of the four.

Every facility that can be desired for “losing each other,” is furnished by the arrangements of the theatre, and by the masked crowd, to parties who may find it convenient to do so. And as in this matter, also, the wishes of at least three of the party were alike, the two couples very speedily lost each other, with the additional advantage of having the excuse of the necessity of finding each other again, ready to account for any unduly prolonged absence from the box head-quarters. Nor was it difficult to find, amid the crowd and the noise and the movement, a spot sufficiently well adapted for the purpose in hand. Especially at that late hour of the night, or rather early hour of the morning, many boxes from which the inmates had departed, and which had been left open by them, afforded, in the midst of the hubbub going on on all sides, facilities for a *tête-à-tête* as secure from interruption as the most embowered nook of moonlit forest

could promise. Perhaps, too, Malatesta may have felt—possibly, also, his companion may have agreed with him in feeling—that the strange costume peculiar to the occasion was not altogether unfavourable to the transaction of the business in hand. The language of the eyes has an eloquence, it is true, which must certainly perish in any attempt to pass through the little oval eye-holes of two masks. But, on the other hand, there is a comfort in the consciousness of being able to “blush unseen” *ad libitum*.

So when Malatesta, allowing the other couple to precede them, and shortly to be shut off from them by the crowd, so as to be “lost” *secundem artem*, drew his companion towards a deserted box, and the two absurdly hideous black figures sat down side by side in the solitude of the back of it, though the hearts of each were beating hard and fast, there was nothing to betray their emotion to each other.

“It is nearly over!” said Giulio; “a few more quarters of the hour, and this wonderful Carnival-time will be gone and past away for ever!”

“Has it been such a wonderful Carnival, Signor Giulio! Why wonderful?”

“It has been very wonderful to me! A wonderful dream-time! And now it is over; and in a few minutes all the light will be put out—all the light of the Carnival, and of my life!”

“What! because the Carnival is over? You,

Signor Giulio, of all others! If Carlo Brancacci had said, now, that he could only live in Carnival-time!—”

“Because I shall no more see you—Stella!” he replied, calling her simply by her name for the first time, and pronouncing the word strongly and distinctly as he did so. He thought he felt a little movement of the hand, which continued, as they sat, to rest on his arm, under the shelter of the falling hood of the domino. He fancied, but was not sure that its pressure was increased by a feather-weight.

“I should be very sorry,” she answered, placing a decided emphasis on the “very,” “if I thought so.”

“But I,” he returned, speaking very slowly and with a solemn sort of distinctness, “can only wish to see you again, Stella, on one condition.”

Then she was sure that the next word must be the decisive one, and knew right well what the one condition must be. But she only said, very faintly and tremblingly, and feeling that, but for the friendly shelter of the mask, she could not have answered at all, “And that condition?—”

“Is, that we should meet to part no more!”

“I hope that we may meet again—”

“On my conditions? Speak, Stella; speak clearly, for the love of Heaven. Have I been too madly audacious in daring to love you? Would

you that we should meet again on the terms I have said?"

"I think I should wish it on any terms, Giulio," whispered Stella.

And then came the torrent of mutual protestations, mutual confessions, mutual vows, like drift-wood-laden waters of a mountain stream freed from their frost-bound quiet by a sudden thaw.

And Stella strove to impart her own cheerful view of the probabilities of the future to her lover. She had no fear that her aunt should make any difficulty, especially when Giulio should have won the distinction in the coming campaign against the Austrians, which she was quite sure awaited him. It was decided between them that he should say nothing, except, of course, to good Carlo Brancacci, till that time. They would write incessantly, of course. All difficulty about letters might be easily got over by the assistance of Signora Palmieri.

And then the great chandelier was seen to begin slowly to descend. It was like the setting of the sun out of their sky; for it intimated the absolute necessity of hurrying back to the Contessa Zenobia's box, and tearing themselves asunder five minutes afterwards with all duly polite speeches and adieux.

And those horrid black masks tied over their faces! They had been welcome but a few minutes before; and now Giulio, with common human ingratitude, was wishing them at the devil.

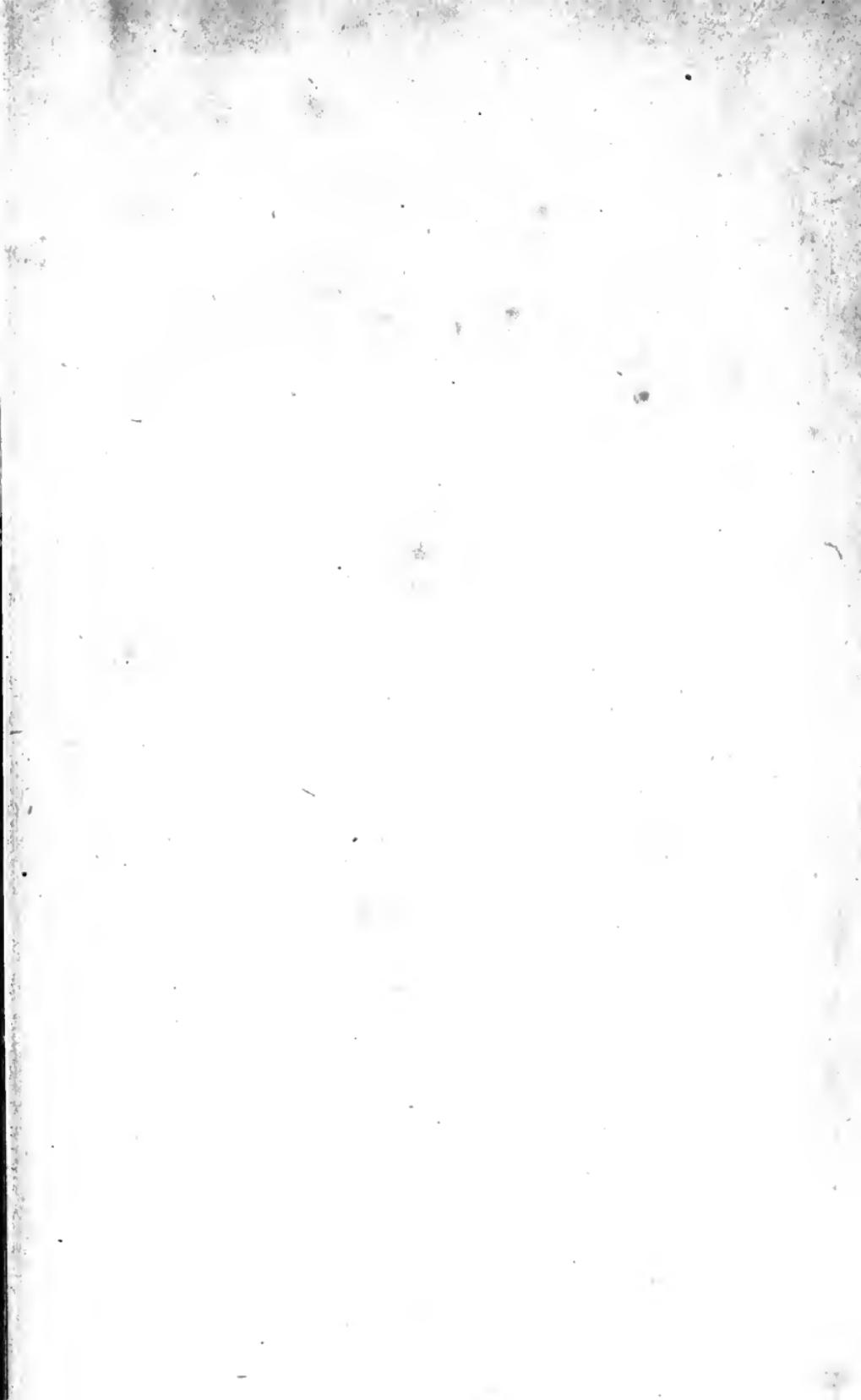
They hurried away to the Altamari box, and found Brancacci faithfully waiting for them at the end of the corridor leading to it. He observed that Stella was obliged to hold her mask to her face with her hand; for the string had somehow got broken.

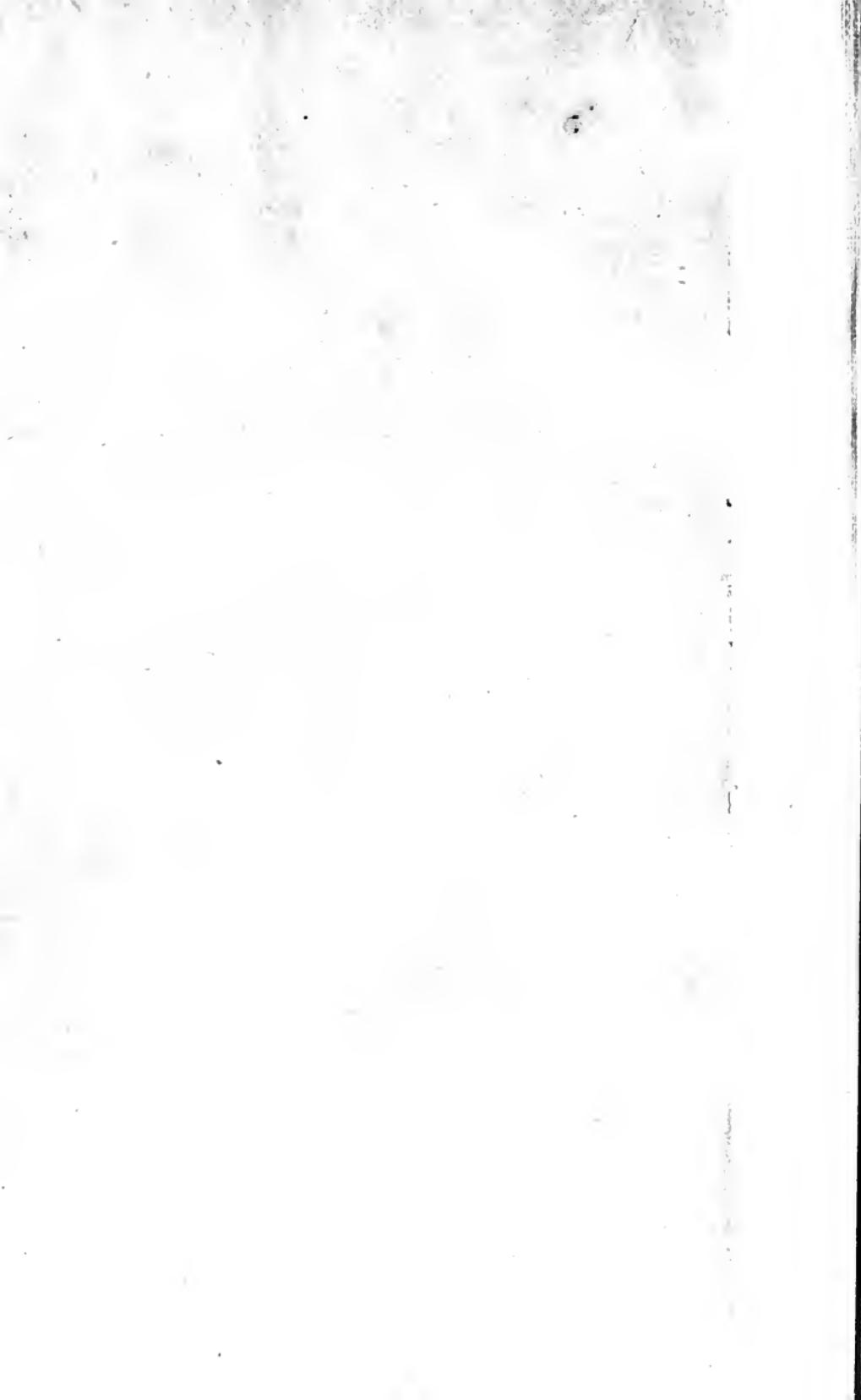
The great chandelier had already descended to the length of its tether, and the revellers were already flipping out the lights, when the four black figures entered the box together, and the whole party prepared to leave the theatre.

And so ended the Carnival of 1848.

END OF BOOK II. AND OF VOL. I.

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Trollope, Thomas Adolphus  
Giulio Malatesta

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